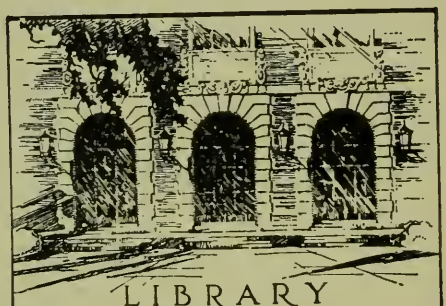
A Woman's Love-Lesson

Emily J. Dunham



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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

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A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON

BY

EMILY J. DUNHAM

'Experience, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies we cannot understand,
Of God's will in His worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad, perplexëd minors.'

E. B. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

A. M. D.

IN MEMORY OF A PROMISE

THIS STORY

IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR.

A WOMAN'S LOVE-LESSON.

CHAPTER I.

'My godmother says that beauty's only skin-deep.'

Mattie Purvis repeated this original sentiment proudly, and looked round her circle of listeners to note the approving gaze she expected as her due. But girls are not naturally reverential; they only become so when excellently trained; and the dozen young women present owed their early education to the village Board

School, and their later training to themselves.

With the independence of the age in which they found themselves, they expected always good value for any reverence they might give, and Mattie's moral remark savoured too much of copy-book wisdom to appeal to minds emancipated from control.

'If it is only skin-deep, why, there isn't a woman living who wouldn't cry her eyes out for it, if she thought tears would buy it!' said Kate Ruggles. 'As for you, Mattie, if good looks aren't worth anything, why do you stand curling your hair before the glass for a quarter of an hour every morning, I should like to know?'

All the girls giggled, including Mattie.

They were met together to form a class,—a reading, working, often gossip-

ing class—Miss Broughton, the rector's daughter, had cajoled them into joining her 'Mutual Improvement Society,' which had a meeting every Wednesday evening, in the reading-room of the Maycross library.

Literature, unless of the penny-dreadful order, did not excite them, plain sewing they performed with aversion; but the occasion for an outing was not despised by them.

Miss Broughton's intention in keeping up the society was a grave one; she wished to raise the girls of her father's parish intellectually, to teach them gradually to aspire to 'better things,' to lead them by easy stages to a height of wisdom, from which they would look back in wonder at the frivolities and follies of their former lives. They were to be trained to become

good women, possibly good wives and mothers; and were encouraged to tell their troubles, love affairs, household difficulties of the present, to their counsellor, teacher and friend, Miss Broughton.

Miss Broughton was but a girl herself, had never known any great trouble, had only just gained a love-affair of a most placid kind, had herself to manage a household—the old servants of which knew to an item what was required of them—and had never gathered experience outside her own home. Still, she was the rector's daughter. By reason of this distinction of birth, she counselled, taught, and befriended the dozen young women who could have given her much varied information.

Mattie Purvis was the favourite of the class; not Miss Broughton's favourite, but

the heroine of the girl-society of Maycross. Romance hovered round her name on account of her superior ancestry, her father and only living relative being a broken-down gentleman; a gentleman, that is to say, in the opinion of the 'Mutual Improvers.' He had once been 'Captain' Purvis, and they gave him the title scrupulously, though rumour declared that he had long before parted with the right to it.

'Once a captain, always a captain,' was Mattie's opinion, and she had impressed it successfully upon her friend's memory.

Kate Ruggles, her chosen 'chum,' was the daughter of a widowed shop-keeper. Everyone knew Mrs. Ruggles' confectionery and baking establishment, with the large plate-glass window, and the green-painted door opening into the High Street. Through serving in the shop all day all

the year, Kate had gathered a repertory of gossip, of the extent and accuracy of which she was more proud than she had ever been of the small amount of learning she owed to school.

The girls usually met at the reading-room a quarter of an hour too early, and spent the time in conversation of an unedifying nature. Miss Broughton, her family affairs, and personal appearance, was a complex subject to which they devoted much discussion, and this evening Mattie's borrowed sentiment on the subject of beauty and its limitation was spoken in connection with an argument as to the good looks of the rector's daughter.

'Well, Miss Broughton doesn't curl *her* hair, anyway,' said a girl from the back of the room.

'I daresay she thinks it's wicked!'

'Because her's grows so low down her forehead that she doesn't need to. I look just wild without a fringe,—see if I don't?'

Mattie pushed back her black curls with both hands, until her hair made a dark aureole round her shapely little head, and revealed an expanse of brow that would have received admiration from a physiognomist.

Her eyes and eyelashes were as black as her curls, and her cheeks had a natural carnation flush upon them, matching the colour of her parted lips.

'Don't spoil yourself, Mattie,' cried large, plain Kate Ruggles; adding, in a whisper, 'you wouldn't like to take all the curl out, I know you wouldn't, to-night, when Mr. Richard's coming home!'

Mattie's face went crimson all over, and she began to unpack her sewing from a

hand-bag, not answering Kate's words, except by the vivid blush.

The other girls continued the discussion.

'I call her handsome, but it takes a lot of looking to find it out. She's that sort of girl. If she'd got more colour she'd be more admired.'

'Or if she dressed more tastily.'

There was a general exclamation of agreement to this.

'Yes,' said Mattie, who had recovered from her confusion by this time, and who was considered an authority on matters of dress, 'if I were a rector's daughter I wouldn't go to church if I didn't have a new frock now and again!'

'Oh, Mattie, but what would your father say?

'It wouldn't be so much what he said that would be important, but what he gave

me out of his pocket!' went on Mattie, unabashed. 'But I'd far and away be dad's daughter than have any rector in the world for a father, that I would!'

Kate, who had been reflecting, gave in words the result of her meditation.

'Miss Broughton, she's got an old dark blue cotton that she's had three summers to my knowledge, a silver-grey alpaca for best, and that serge coat and skirt she wears with shirts, and that's all; and she's not having anything new, because she always has her dresses made in the village, and when I saw Miss Mearson yesterday I asked.'

'I suppose Mr. Hedworth wouldn't like her to think too much of dress, he being a curate!' suggested someone else.

'Nonsense!' cried Mattie. 'Curates are only men after all, and he tries to do his

little girl up in blue ribbons, though he *is* as poor as a rat!'

'It's a pity then that his sister don't smarten herself up a bit.'

'Oh, Miss Grace would never look anything!'

Kate, who was peering through the window, now made the announcement that Miss Broughton was coming across the street.

'How she's looking?' asked Mattie.

'She's got on the alpaca, and her Sunday bonnet,—that must be because she's going on to the station to meet Mr. Richard!'

Mattie's cheeks went red again.

Then there was a general drawing-out of work from the various receptacles, and Kate hurried to get the history that was being read on Wednesday evenings.

By the time Anna Broughton entered

the room she found her class preparing for work, their eyes bent dutifully upon their needles, their tongues suspiciously silent.

Suspicion not being part of Anna's nature, her surprise at the dulness of the assembly did not make her guess that her own arrival had checked conversation. She often felt that she did not quite understand her pupils, but she as often consoled herself with the reflection that their simple characters did not require to be understood. Very docile, good girls, she thought them; sometimes a little inclined to giggle, not very industrious, not as religious as she hoped to make them, but always exceedingly polite to her.

She was interested in them as human beings of a completely different nature to her own, creatures of a lower order altogether, who needed principles, for safe-

guarding them from evil; who were exposed to temptations incidental to their state of life from which she, as rector's daughter, was mercifully free. Anna was not of a self-contemplative disposition, but it had occurred to her that she had reason to be grateful for her own steadiness; she could not imagine any reason why she should ever hesitate between the claims of duty and of inclination. She was twenty-six, and had always found satisfaction in behaving well.

The dozen girls of her class might become good girls for their position in life, but they could not expect to enjoy the same immunity from temptation, thought Anna. It was only natural that there were great advantages in being born a rector's daughter.

She was absolutely unselfconscious as

she walked down the room to the head of the long table, and cast her eyes approvingly over her quiet class. Smiling upon them, she gave them the words of praise that they seemed to merit.

'It is good of you to be so punctual, girls.'

Then came a chorus of 'Good-evening, miss.' A spectator would have imagined that the class had only just become aware of its teacher's presence.

Anna replied to the greetings cordially, while she drew off her grey silk gloves, and unlocked the drawer in the table where she kept her sewing. The unfinished garment would eventually become a flannel petticoat, and clothe the rheumatic limbs of some old woman in the winter.

Now it was summer. Bees and butterflies tapped the large window sometimes,

attracted to its vicinity by the odour of the yellow jasmine that trailed up the wall beside it. The lower sash was down, for the noises from the village street, though few in number and far from exciting, would have made the girl's attention wander from the history of past days to the small but present events of life in a country town.

Anna sat down in the librarian's armchair, and found the place in the book.

'Please, Miss Broughton, I want to ask a question,' said Mattie, hurriedly.

Looking at the speaker's flushed cheeks, and bright excited eyes, Anna wondered, then remembered that to make a great fuss of little things was Mattie's habit. These two young women, to consider them by comparison for once, were nearer together in education and breeding than

Anna at all realized; to her Mattie seemed no better in either way than the others, but Mattie herself *felt* an indescribable difference. She saw through Miss Broughton's innocent self-deceptions, she laughed at her calm consciousness of superiority.

Anna laid the book down.

'I am glad you told me before we began,' she said, in the grave, clear tones which always emphasized the correct enunciation of her words. 'If we interrupt the reading by conversation we are apt to forget the thread of the writer's argument, and if your thoughts are full of personal concerns you do not appreciate what is read. I will try to answer the question, Mattie. Is it a very hard one?'

'No, at least not to you, I suppose, though dad says that learned men can't agree upon the rights of it. It is this,

"Why can a rich man go to his club on a Sunday, and go to see his friends, and drink what he likes, and stay at his club as late as he likes, and a poor man is—"'

'Mattie, I am sorry to interrupt you, but you must know that if we try to discuss a question of that kind, we shall waste a great deal of time. A poor man may go to see his friends on a Sunday if he desires to do so, though it is certainly better for him to spend the day with his wife and children. Your father is unhappily a socialist, and he——'

'My dad's the friend of the poor!' cried Mattie, 'that's what he calls himself.'

Anna made no reply, her manner showing that she considered the contradiction both unimportant and impolite. Handing the book to Kate Ruggles, she asked her to begin to read.

'We are at the commencement of the reign of Alfred.'

Mattie shrugged her shoulders petulantly; then, seeming to repent her vexation, she gave a low laugh, and began to stitch.

Often at the class meetings the mention of Captain Purvis brought an element of discord to disturb the placid atmosphere of learning. Anna was tempted to believe that his daughter delighted in her power to produce that discord, but seldom yielded to the temptation, preferring to think that Mattie erred through inadvertence rather than through malice.

A long-standing disagreement between the rector and Mattie's father had of late assumed the proportions of a public quarrel. The captain had instituted a club for the propagation of socialism, the mem-

bers of which club had been in the habit of meeting on Saturday nights at 'The Four Stars Inn,' a public-house in the Back Street. After trying to defeat the radical spirit, which was growing among the working-men of the parish, by argument rather than by other opposition, the rector had come to the conclusion that it was his duty to be belligerent. He had purchased the public-house, and the ground on which it stood, and, as the lease fell in that June, he had given the landlord notice to quit, it being his intention to make a private dwelling of the place.

Captain Purvis, who loved nothing more than notoriety, had tried to persuade the law to protect the publican—but vainly; now he had announced his intention (at moments both of sobriety and of in-

toxication had the threat escaped his lips) of 'paying out the old rector.'

How far Mattie sympathised with her father Anna did not know, but the introduction of a socialistic question into the meeting of 'Mutual Improvers,' was either very foolish, or a rude attempt to disturb the peace of the assembly.

As Mattie laughed Anna looked sharply at her, all her suspicions of the girl's malicious intent leaping into her mind again.

Miss Broughton found her own thoughts wandering from the consideration of King Alfred's affairs, this evening she was more inattentive than the laziest girl present. She was relieved when the hands of the clock pointed to the hour of release.

'The time is up, girls. Put the marker in the book, please.'

'Yes, miss. We shall finish Alfred next time. Mr. Richard's coming home won't make any difference, will it?'

'None at all.'

'I thought you might want the evening to go out with him on the river, or something of that kind, miss, as it's so long since he was home for good.'

'We can none of us afford to neglect duty for pleasure, Eliza.'

'Perhaps Mr. Richard is going away again, miss?'

'I do not know.'

'Is he going to be a rector too, Miss Anna?'

'It is not decided.'

'If I were a man I'd be a rector!' said Mattie, 'then I should be able to go to see everyone in the parish, find out all their concerns, and scold them when I wanted

to! Oh, it must be grand to stand up in a pulpit and preach. And have everyone obliged, for the sake of being thought respectable, to come to church and listen!'

With which parting speech Mattie gave a little nod to her teacher, and vanished through the doorway.

CHAPTER II.

Again Anna felt annoyed, but she tried not to show it. With a gesture of weariness she pushed back the fair hair that grew so low in the middle of her forehead then rose over the temples. With the natural waviness of that fine gold hair, the rector's daughter, as Mattie had declared, had certainly no temptation to cultivate a fringe.

'You're tired, miss. You look as though you'd got a headache. Won't you stop at the shop on your way home and let

mother give you a cup of tea in the parlour? She'd be proud to do it.'

Kate Ruggles was the only girl left beside Miss Broughton herself.

Anna smiled gratefully, but declined. Kate was always a satisfactory pupil, having a large store of good humour, and being more respectful in manner than any of the others. There was never any fear that Kate would 'forget her place.'

'My mother has been ill to-day, and I have been too much indoors,' Anna explained. 'Excitement always does her harm, and she is eagerly counting the moments until my brother returns. A mother seems to think so much of a son.'

'And no wonder, miss, particularly when the son's as fine a young man as Mr. Richard. You see, miss, they're all a bit

wild when they're young—it's no use expecting too much of a man! Of course we all heard about Mr. Richard's being turned away from school, but, dear me, that's years ago! And if the gentleman he's been travelling with don't give no very good account of him now, why, miss, it's a kind of law of nature that the old don't understand the young.'

'I am sorry that my brother should be the talk of the village, Kate,' said Anna, with a reproving air.

'We must gossip a bit, miss, or else we should get into worse mischief; there's so little goes on in Maycross we must make interests for ourselves. Of course, it's not for us to doubt the rector's being right in everything, but, having known Mr. Richard as a boy, we do feel we'd like him to be given his chance.'

'No doubt he will be more steady now that he is older.'

'That's it, miss, give him some trust to make him feel he's a responsible creature. If you'll excuse my mentioning him in the same breath with Mr. Richard, that's what I'm doing with Tom.'

'*Kate!* You promised me last month that you would give up Tom.'

The elder girl seemed in no way hurt by Anna's disparaging tone. She laughed genially.

'Ah, I said I'd try if I could give him up, but I found I couldn't, miss, and you'll see it'll be all for the best. If I can't keep him away from the drink always, why I can sometimes, and he won't drink himself to death as he'd do if I threw him over. Besides, he's some one to love, miss. I'm not good-looking, nor young, and maybe

I shouldn't get another man to care about me.'

'But, Kate, a girl ought not to want a lover. If she finds that her heart is won, that she has grown to love some man who has paid her attention, then that is different; there is no harm in being kind to him, if her parents approve, and if he bears a good character . . . But to accept a man who is not trustworthy, because she is afraid that no other man will propose to her . . . Oh, Kate, Kate, I am surprised! . . . A self-respecting young woman ought not to regard herself as a failure if she has no lover. We have not all of us vocations for matrimony.'

'But I am fond of Tom, miss, and he's fond of me in his way. I don't think it would be fair to give him up because I

fancy his drinking habits will make a home uncomfortable.'

'But the degradation, Kate!'

'It won't be as bad as it would if he hadn't anyone to care when he makes a beast of himself, miss. He's always sorry next morning.'

'We have always taken a great interest in you, Kate; I know my father will be grieved to hear that you really mean to marry Tom Casson.'

'It's Mr. Hedworth can manage Tom best, miss, meaning no disrespect to the rector. You see, I suppose it's because a curate can do things a rector can't or wouldn't like to.'

Anna's grey eyes became more gentle in expression.

'What has Mr. Hedworth done?'

'It was last Saturday night, miss. Poor Tom had been overcome, and Mr. Hedworth found him coming along the towpath from Huntstown. Tom wasn't walking very straight,—the drink always takes him that way because his legs aren't strong,—and what did Mr. Hedworth do but take his arm and bring him home to his lodging in safety, to prevent the risk of his falling into the water and being drowned. All through the Back Street they walked together, arm in arm, for Captain Purvis met them, and he said to me only yesterday, "Kate, my dear, if there's a good man left on earth who isn't a socialist, that man's name is Philip Hedworth!" You know the captain's way, miss; he didn't mean no rudeness.'

'I cannot help being sorry for you, Kate. If you are miserable in the future

you will not be able to say that you were not warned; you will owe your troubles to your own wilfulness.'

'Yes, miss, so I shall; but I'd rather be miserable myself than that Tom should be.'

'Is not your mother distressed at your decision?'

'She says I ought to have done better, miss, only I take after poor father in looks, and he was so ugly that he was refused half-a-dozen times before mother took pity on him.'

'Well, I must be going, Kate.'

'You're walking to the station to meet Mr. Richard?'

'No. I am going back to my mother.'

Anna went out into the fading sunshine of the evening. As she passed along the street many nods, smiles, and curtsies

of recognition were bestowed upon her, for the poorer part of the Maycross population was airing itself in front gardens or on doorsteps.

Chubby-faced children peered over the green and white palings, among tall lilies and blue and yellow iris, or peeped roguishly from upper windows embowered in honeysuckle. These little ones had great respect for 'Miss Anna,' but their ove was tempered by awe. She was always kind, with that good-natured toleration of infantile silliness and scrapes which a grown-up person of amiable disposition has for children, but she never unbent, never romped with the most winning of babies, never forgot the dignity which she maintained with such ease, never ceased to remember her position of authority as rector's daughter.

Once or twice she stopped to ask some mother after a sick child, or enquire thoughtfully about the absent son who was a trouble, the state of some precarious business, the condition of some bed-ridden grand-parent.

Her enquiries were answered according to the spirit in which they were made, that is to say, cordially; but the women watched her as she walked away, and exchanged criticisms as to her sentiments.

'Miss Broughton she do seem to think that poor folk ought to be grateful for any sort of a roof above them! When I told her how the rain came through last night, drip, drip, right on Dickie's bed, she says, "Well," says she, "you had better move his bed to the other corner of the room, and persuade the landlord to mend the roof before winter comes."'

'Yes, and when she heard t'other day as Bob Sarbin's mother was laid up with asthma, "I'm sorry," she says, "but Mrs. Sarbin ought to be glad she has been blessed with such excellent health until now."'

'I wonder what Master Richard 'll do, now he's comin' home agen. I all'us do think it's hard for a young fellow to belong to a rectory.'

'An' though there's not a word I'd speak agen the rector, still I must say as Master Richard's likely to find hisself kept a sharp watch over, an' there's nothing drives a young man into mischief like feelin' spied upon. Why, there was Mrs. Kitson's Jim went an' 'listed all because of the eye she kep' on him.'

But Miss Broughton had no idea that 'father's parishioners' were discussing her

or her brother Richard, or the discipline of rectory life. She went on her way quickly, walking gracefully, as does a girl who is accustomed to much pedestrianism with a purpose: her tall, well-developed figure showing symmetry in spite of the folds, flounces, and gathers of the Sunday alpaca.

A lane which turned northwards out of the end of the High Street led to the rectory. Wild bramble and hawthorn hedges hid the sandy stretch of narrow road until the traveller was fairly round the first wind of the corner, then there were other twists and turns, over-arched by tree-branches, made irregular by out-jutting banks, which ensured the privacy of a lane which was only traversed by those having business at the church or rectory, or the curate's cottage.

Anna had rounded one of the turns, when, walking away before her, she saw a figure she knew; a black-robed figure, crowned by a light-brown head of hair and a clerical hat.

It was the Reverend Philip Hedworth, who had escorted drunken Tom Casson home in safety.

Anna blushed.

A few weeks ago she had regarded Mr. Hedworth as a friend, her father's able coadjutor; but of late a revelation had come to her, partly by the agency of neighbours' nods and becks and wreathéd smiles, partly out of Philip's own serious eyes; this had forced her to realise that he was courting her.

Now he was a good man, worthy of all her respect and confidence, so there was

not the slightest reason why she should not accept him.

Having blushed and paused in her walk a moment Anna began to blame her own folly. Was she, the rector's daughter, to alter her pace because she saw the curate walking slowly along in front of her? If this foolishness were encouraged, it would prevent her from working zealously with him in Sunday-school. It was unworthy of them both.

Hearing a quick step immediately behind him, Philip Hedworth turned and lifted his hat.

'Miss Broughton, I was on my way to see the rector. Is he busy?'

'Surely not too busy to see you, Mr. Hedworth! You probably wish to consult him on some matter?'

'I do; yes, that was my object.'

Anna and the curate walked on together. His face was thoughtful, he seemed in doubt, to judge by his puzzled expression. Now and then he pulled his brown beard; it was more by reason of this unconscious habit than on account of any dandyism in trimming, that the beard was sharply pointed, in a fashion becoming to his thin profile. The villagers spoke of the curate as 'a plain man;' plainness, and a suspicion of eccentricity his appearance did suggest; yet, supposing that fate could ever have made him fashionable, and given him the self-assurance and small airs and graces which go with conceit, no critic would have detected anything wanting in the proportion of his limbs and features. In the matter of looks, human beings are very much what

they try to be; just as many a plain woman has contrived to be called beautiful, so Philip Hedworth with care, and a different disposition, might have passed for a handsome man.

He stole one or two admiring glances at Anna; Anna looked at him when his face was turned away again, and wondered what thoughts were engrossing him.

'I have been hearing your praises this evening,' she said, after a while. 'Kate Ruggles was very grateful to you for your kindness to that unfortunate man, Casson. It is a great pity that Kate has taken him back into favour.'

'He may improve,' Hedworth answered, reluctant to admit that Tom was a regular reprobate. 'A good woman's influence may teach him to have a higher ideal of happiness than can be satisfied by drink-

ing. I think you know that I have profound faith in woman's natural goodness, Miss Broughton. When she doesn't try to copy man, she is stronger than the majority of men as an elevating influence.'

'But Kate . . .' said Anna, hesitatingly. 'I do not mean to hint that Kate is other than a very estimable young woman, but . . .'

As she paused Philip said, with one of his placid smiles at her,

'Love has power to idealize,—thank God that it is so.'

The rector's daughter, who had never looked into the depths of dark lives as Philip Hedworth had done, scarcely understood his meaning.

It was not her fault that she was an unsympathetic, rather ignorant girl at this stage in her career; her opportunities had

been small, and no one had taught her to enlarge them. Prejudices, founded on sterling principles, had been as a fence of gold around her childhood,—a fence too precious to be destroyed, in which she had learned to take pride. When a strong passion made her break down that barrier, she might emerge, a noble woman, into a wider world.

Her preconceptions of many things were truthful now, but were not always strong enough to make her tolerant of those flaws without which nothing earthly is, and which add value to the unique virtue. Mr. Hedworth fulfilled her preconceived expectation of goodness in man, yet as she looked at him, she saw clearly all that was, or appeared, absurd in his humble personality. To-night there was a hole in his sock, and his trousers were turned up

for fear the country mud might spot them. A small paper parcel in his outer pocket had come unfastened, and from it obtruded the head of a penny china doll.

Philip's next sentence was very simple. The anxious absorbed expression had come back into his eyes.

'I want to ask the rector two questions, Miss Broughton, one of which is an appeal. The first is about the interpretation of the chapter for the next Bible-class meeting, the second is whether he can dispense with my help over the coal club accounts to-morrow night? I am anxious to stay at home, for my sister has to go out, and Trot has a feverish attack.'

Anna guessed that the penny doll in the curate's pocket was for sick 'Trot,' but she thought that he might have seen that it was properly wrapped up. No doubt

he had come all through the village with that shiny black head visible.

'Poor little girl. I hope she will soon be better,' she answered, cordially, for Trot and Jerry Hedworth were little people who besides reigning over their father's heart enjoyed considerable favour in the hearts of the parish. People often said how sad it was for so young a man to have lost years ago a dearly-loved wife; but no one who knew the children pitied him for having two such tiny cares as Trot and Jerry.

Philip smiled gratefully at Anna, who had spoken kindly of his little girl.

'You see,' he explained, 'Trot always sleeps so much better if I tell her a fairy-tale when she's gone to bed.'

CHAPTER III.

While the rector's daughter was walking homewards Kate Ruggles had returned to her domestic circle, and to the shop, No. 17, High Street, of which she and her mother were as proud as a newly-made peer of his ancestors. The benefits enjoyed to-day were owing to the worthiness of past generations. No Ruggles had failed to add his stone to the erection of this utilitarian family trophy; a great-grandfather had put in the plate-glass window, a grandparent had bestowed a

new wing,—a nearer relative had widened the space between the counter and the door,—Mrs. Ruggles herself had purchased two marble-and-iron tables for customers' use, and lately a gaily-painted board had been attached to the outside wall, announcing that a big cup of tea and a roll and butter could be obtained at the establishment for the modest sum of sevenpence.

Within the plate-glass window were arranged neatly, buns, scones, loaves, cakes, jam-puffs and tartlets, sandwiches and sweetmeats; and behind all these dainties Kate's smiling face looked out into the street.

She had a maiden-hair fern growing in a pot on the counter near her, and some crochet-work to occupy her fingers but not her eyesight.

When dusk descended upon Maycross, Mrs. Ruggles would toddle out of the parlour, and light up the three gas-jets which marked her shop as superior to any other of the village.

To-night Kate greeted the stout old lady jocularly:

'Hullo, mother, come to buy some sweeties?'

This joke was in allusion to Mrs. Ruggles' weakness for brandy-balls, and it lost nothing by repetition. Mother and daughter always paid it the tribute of laughter.

'No, Kitty, not this time; I'm going to save up my farthin's.'

Being asthmatic, Mrs. Ruggles was sparing of her words, for they cost her many efforts; it was Kate who talked enough for both of them. To-night, however, she did

not begin to detail an account of the Mutual Improvement Society meeting and of its president's looks and manners. After lingering a few minutes, wondering at her daughter's unusual dulness, Mrs. Ruggles toddled back into the parlour and closed the door to keep out the night-air.

She had no sooner gone than Mattie Purvis ran in from the street.

'Kate, Kate, he's not come by the seven o'clock train, so he *must* arrive by the next!'

Her eager little face was flushed, for she had run all the way from the station; her eyes were very bright, with mingled love and excitement.

Kate hospitably raised the flap of the counter and invited her friend to take a stool next to her own; but Mattie's mind

was too restless at the moment to allow her body to be still, she preferred standing near the window, that she might chatter while watching the raised pathway of the road.

'I suppose you're glad Miss Broughton wasn't going to meet him?' suggested Kate. 'You couldn't well have done it if she had.'

'I haven't done it, and I don't mean to. Oh, Kate, as though I would dare!'

'Why, you said you'd been to the station.'

'Only to peep; I stayed on the bridge and looked down at the platform. I could see everyone who got out of the train. Of course if I'd seen him I should have run away.'

'That's a queer way of treating a lover.'

'*Kitty!* . . . . Oh, it does sound nice to hear you call him that. But he's not like any other lover, he's so far above me in everything. I don't say that because I don't think my dad's as good as the old rector, but because of . . . . of Mr. Richard himself. He's so clever. He can speak four languages. . . . Oh, Kate, do you think he'll come back the same?'

'I should think he might have learned to speak a few more.'

'You're laughing at me! I meant, will he come back . . . *to me*, Kate?'

'He was tremendously fond of you when he went away, that's certain. But I told you then that you ought to have got engaged to him, as he wanted.'

'No!' cried Mattie, stamping her foot on the floor. 'The rectory folk would have thought I wanted to catch him . . . So I

do, but for his sake, not for his position, nor for his money, nor for anybody or anything else! . . . I'd be true to him if he hadn't a half-penny or a friend in the world . . . *Oh, Kate, he's come . . . he's walking past the window.*'

Kate rose and looked out over Mattie's head.

The younger girl fell on her knees and rested her chin on the edge of the shelf upon which were arranged the cakes, loaves, and pastry. Here dark, still-childlike eyes, with their longing, appealing expression, might have been those of some penniless little girl who wanted some 'sweeties;' but her heart, prematurely aged to womanhood, was beating with the warmth of a passion which was not ignoble.

Neither Mattie nor Kate saw the

ludicrous side of the former's romantic attachment, nor the absurdity of the scene now progressing. They were accustomed to finding pathos in a common-place environment.

'Kitty, he mustn't see me watching him! . . . *Oh, you dear, you dear, you're handsomer than ever* . . . Isn't he bronzed? . . . and he looks grave . . . I wonder, are you thinking of me, my own Dick . . . my darling?'

On the opposite side of the way Richard Broughton was walking, with his head bent, his hat pulled over his eyes, his hand grasping a shabby portmanteau. It was two years since he had last set foot in Maycross, and he had changed more in appearance than in nature during that time of travel. A fair moustache showed light upon his sun-tanned skin, his shoulders

were broad, his tread firm, his bearing suggested strength and obstinacy.

Mattie noticed this new trait in his looks, and spoke of it.

'Kate, doesn't he step as though all the world belonged to him?'

'That he does, Mattie; but he's aged very much; he might be twenty-five instead of twenty-three. Now I tell you what you ought to do; run round by Darver's lane, across Canning's meadow, and meet him in the rectory lane. He'll only think you've been up to the church for something, and, by the first glance when he sees you, you'll find out if he's still fond of you.'

Mattie impetuously sprang up, and kissed her fingers again and again to the retreating figure.

'My hero . . . my handsome Dick . . .

you haven't forgotten me, I *know* you haven't!'

'Look sharp, or you won't have time,' said Kate, the practical.

With a farewell hug to her friend and a murmur of thanks for the brilliant suggestion, Mattie darted out of the shop as fast as she had entered it.

Kate felt quite excited to know how the meeting was progressing, as she waited for the young girl's return. She admired Mattie with the most ungrudging devotion, loved her as a superior creature to herself, relished keenly the daring nature of a love affair with the rector's only son, Miss Anna's brother. Kate was very much swayed by circumstances. When she was talking to Miss Anna she liked her sincerely, regarding her as entitled to respectful loyalty; when she was sharing Mattie's

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defiance towards the Broughton family she was persuaded that the rector and his daughter were wrong in being hard upon poor Mr. Richard! Yet never would Kate betray Mattie to Anna, nor Anna to Mattie. She merely liked to be on good terms with both of them.

But the meeting in the lane did not take place after all. Kate had not been alone five minutes when Mattie, rather pale, but otherwise quite herself, walked calmly into the shop again.

'You silly! why, you've missed him!'

Mattie did not resent the remark, but she drew up her little figure proudly, and announced, with an air of dignity, though tears were in her eyes,

'I *couldn't!* It would have been running after him. It's his place to run after me.'

The audacity of which remark, in reference to a rector's son, almost took away Kate's breath.

So Richard Broughton met no one in the rectory lane.

He was not altogether glad to be home again, and was preparing himself mentally for the ordeals consequent upon home-coming,—his father's severe scrutiny and catechetical enquiries, his sister's patronising kindness, his mother's loving welcome. Then there would be a public, as well as those three private ordeals; an hour's general conversation after supper, when the family circle would include Philip Hedworth, and he, Richard, the returned traveller, would be expected to entertain them all with an account of his voyages, while his appearance and history would be freely discussed to his face.

Yet it was strange but true that, of all the ordeals, the young man shrank most from his invalid mother's welcome. She had such unbounded trust in him, such tender credulity for his slightest explanation, such disbelief in the possibility that he by any chance could ever be unsatisfactory.

There had been several unlucky episodes in his early career, school-boy sins, which had earned him a bad reputation, Anna's distrust, his father's severity; but his mother had never been made to credit any one of them. He had been misjudged, she thought; she had tenderly told him her opinion as to the true versions of the affairs,—versions which proved conclusively that his motives had been of the best, his sins virtues, only appearances had made them look like sins.

As a boy, Richard had preferred his father's castigations to his mother's excuses, for the former had filled his rebellious heart with rage, the latter only had humiliated him. Sometimes he had honestly tried to blame himself to her, to make her see in him the black sheep he was, and believed he always would be; but no good ever came of these attempts. Happy in the completeness of her faith, poor Mrs. Broughton smiled, as she lay on her couch for hours alone, and thought what a blessed thing it was that 'dear Richard had no vanity, thought so meekly of his own virtues, was such a beautiful character!' Then the mother would tearfully thank God for having given her this noble son.

Poor Richard! Poor mother! Their mutual love was a joy to them, but not

the joy it might have been. Their hearts were banded together, while the other two members of the family were convinced that the mother was weakly forgiving, and the son a hardened deceiver.

'Richard can always twist poor mother round his little finger,' Anna would say to her father; and the rector would often warn his son,

'Take care, Dick, my boy; you cannot humbug me, you know. I am not your mother.'

When Mr. Broughton used a vulgar word such as 'humbug,' his disdainful tone gave it almost a classical beauty. None of the sights and sounds that greeted the young man's return had any agreeable association with his memory. He had hated Maycross as a child, and as a man he loathed it more.

The white wood gate flew open at his touch, he remembered the rattle of the latch; there were patches of pansies in the flower-bed bordering the gravel, he had helped Anna to sow the seeds; the dove-coloured sun-dial on the lawn was still broken—he had smashed it once in a fit of temper, and been locked up in consequence. The iron scraper on the step gave its accustomed rattle as his foot touched it.

There was no need for him to ring the bell which hung above the lintel for the door was open all day long, with old Neptune, the water-spaniel, lying on the mat to act as porter. Neptune did not bark at Richard, knowing him at once, but exhibited no excitement, having lost a young dog's interest in men and things. He merely tapped the ground with his feath-

ered tail, and rolled on his back for the caress he expected.

Richard patted the sleek, brown side, then stepped over the recumbent animal, and made for the library.

The rector was sitting before the long table which was littered with papers, his back was towards the door, giving his son an opportunity to reconnoitre the room and its occupant.

Thank goodness, the curate wasn't there too, thought Richard. Not that he had the least objection to Philip Hedworth personally, rather liked him in fact, but first meetings with a stern father are trying under any circumstances, and intolerable in the presence of a third person, an outsider.

Richard decided that the 'governor' was looking older, had less grey hair

falling over his collar, and more of a stoop about his shoulders; he wore spectacles for reading, a thing he had not done when Dick was last at home.

A tap at the door made Mr. Broughton look round.

'Hope you're well, sir, and the mater as little ill as possible?'

'So that is you, Richard.'

In this manner the black sheep re-entered the parental fold.

From the instant when he had knocked with his knuckles upon the hard wood of the library door Richard had assumed a new manner, almost a new individuality. The action of tapping had reminded him of the qualms of conscience, the dread with which he had gone into his father's presence on many occasions formerly, and with the recollection had come the dis-

covery that this was changed for ever. He disliked the scene in which he had to take part, he rebelled against the coming catechism and exhortation, but he was not trembling, his heart was beating quietly, he did not fear anything that could be done or said to him. For the future he might have to endure being made the subject of his father's private sermons, he might be considered and treated as a reprobate by nature, but indifference to criticism arose from the knowledge of the impossibility of punishment. What could be done to him? Nothing. He was no longer boy, but man.

One sorrowing look, the dread of one tear from the frail invalid who lived most of her life in the darkened room above the library, could have led Dick Broughton to

make any sacrifice of pride or inclination, one loving word could have made him humble. Perhaps this fact was proof positive that the rector was wrong in his treatment of a high-spirited son.

Many a good man errs through fear of weakly yielding to a tender impulse now and then. Mr. Broughton was severe to all the world including himself, and when sometimes he had felt disposed to rule Dick, his boy, by kindness only, he had regarded the disposition as a temptation of the evil one. If severity was best for the parishioners, why should it not be best for Dick?

'So that is you, Richard,' he repeated, conscious of a difference between the youth who had gone away and the young fellow who had returned.

The two men stared in each other's eyes.

'Yes, sir, and I'm tired of globe-trotting. I've come home to settle down.'

'I am glad to hear it. Your companion, by his letters, did not lead me to expect that you were in any way steadied by experience.'

Richard laughed.

'Old men don't understand young ones. I wanted to see and do everything while I was abroad, but now I'm back I want to work for a change.'

'And in a short while you will probably desire some other change.'

Mr. Broughton's tone was sharp, for he had not liked that unfortunately chosen speech limiting the understanding of 'old men,' having heard in it intentional insult.

Richard, two years ago, would have lost his temper at an accusation, but to-night he

passed it by with a shrug of his shoulders.

'You had better go to your room and get ready for supper,' said the rector. 'You can come down to me in a quarter of an hour, when I shall have finished my sermon. Anna and Hedworth are in the drawing-room, and your mother is lying down, as usual.'

CHAPTER IV.

But the quarter-of-an-hour passed and Richard did not return to the library, and the drawing-room knew him not. He was sitting on the edge of his mother's couch, holding her thin hand in his big brown one, and enlivening her by a recital of his adventures.

There was still that meek young feeling in his heart when he saw her gaze admiring him, that same passionate longing to go away and hide himself from the dear eyes that saw only perfection in his

face,—away, above all, from the tender trust which believed that never since his babyhood had he kept one secret from her.

He had cried for want of her when he had been abroad, (big baby, maudlin, sentimental fool, great idiot, he had called himself when he had found on his cheek the tear he could not help!) he knew that if he went away again he would come back, drawn irresistibly by that pure love which was the strongest influence his nature had known as yet.

There was one comfort left him, he could kiss and caress her, that gave her pleasure, he could guard her and care for her, never forgetting any little service for her comfort, planning all day long how to give her happiness. He was proud of her, proud of his devotion to her, would have quarrelled

with any man who had dared to laugh at him for it; though he objected to being home-sick when absent, he liked being fond of his little mother when present. He would devote his holidays to cheering her up,—she looked more of a shadow, less substantial even than when he had said good-bye to her, and *then* a lump had risen in his throat, choking his words of farewell, because of a fear that he might never kneel by her couch again and feel her lips pressed to his.

If he could not quite look her in the face, not without regrets and an effort at any rate, why he could at least make her happy! And he had never been very bad, from a young man's point of view he was eminently praiseworthy! The worst of it was that this little woman, with the pain-drawn face, who spent what she called her

'idle days' in prayer for him, gave him all her trust from her own point of view, which was widely different to that of modern young men!

So Richard's voice was rather husky as he said,

'I've come home to be good, dear. You shall see how well I shall get on with the governor, and with work, and with everything!'

'That is said like my Richard! You see, others will not take it all on trust as I do, dear,—no one can understand you, can read your whole heart and soul like your poor little mother, from whom you've never kept one thought or ambition. I *know* what you are without being shown, —but it will be very gratifying when everyone knows, Dick, and when they all praise you.'

'They won't do that! The pater would not praise me if I stood on a pedestal and all the rest of mankind was bowing down before me!'

'My funny boy, what wild things you do say! Your father has a high ideal, because he is such a wonderful man himself; and . . . and he speaks strongly out of a sense of duty, Richard, to make you realise all we expect of you. He does not mean to blame, only to brace you for great exertions; he would be more gentle with anyone from whom he hoped less.'

Richard grimaced, and playfully stroked her closed eyes, as he changed the awkward subject.

'How is Anna going on? Sunday schools, and penny readings, etc., etc., flourishing, I suppose?'

'Yes, Dick, she is a zealous worker. She often makes me feel ashamed of my idleness, but now you are come perhaps I shall feel stronger, and you will take me out to see some of the poor? You have such a strong arm, dear.'

'I'll carry you into the garden to-morrow by way of a beginning. Now, what news have you for me? Old Mother Drinkwater hasn't been gathered to her grandmothers, I hear.'

'She is growing younger, Dick! Some people do when they are as old as she, but I'm afraid I shan't live long enough to try!'

Dick sat silent. He wanted to contradict her, but he did not dare. She seldom spoke of herself, and her nature was averse to every morbid train of

thought, so she went on talking after a moment's pause.

'Your father and Mrs. Drinkwater are no better friends than they used to be—worse indeed, I fear. I wrote to you about the quarrel with Captain Purvis, did I not?'

'Some public-house that's going to be closed, the one where Purvis had his socialist club meetings, isn't it?—I thought the "pater" had put his foot down too forcibly,—Purvis will be even with him somehow, and, after all, little mother, these radical chaps have a great deal of right on their side.'

'How charitable you are, dear.'

'And . . . Mattie . . . Mattie Purvis—the tiny girl with the gipsy hair and eyes, what about her?'

'Oh, you remember what a pretty child

she used to be! She has quite grown up, Dick.'

'Why, she was seventeen when I went away.'

'Seventeen is childhood to some girls, though I was only eighteen when I was a mother, Richard, and, oh, how proud I was of my baby-girl! She had such a sweet little face . . .'

'I suppose Hedworth thinks her face sweet now! It's a queer world.'

'Anna *is* handsome.'

'She'd make a good curate, so I conclude she'll make a good curate's wife. Does she mean to, eh, mother? There's no accounting for taste, and I know the poor chap was gone upon her years ago.'

'She does not like to be questioned; I don't know what her feelings are. Probably she has confided in her father.'

'When I'm sure I'm in love, if I can I shall confide in you.'

'My dear, kind, thoughtful boy!'

'Only if I fall in love with some one the pater won't approve, why then I may get you into trouble if you share my secret.'

'I would rather help you to bear troubles than I would be without them, Dick dear.'

They were happy in each other's society, this mother and son, yet they were not at ease. She longed to say many words to him that she repressed, because they could not be spoken without a suspicion of disloyalty to the head of the family. The rector's wife rebuked the mother. But that one speech she had delighted herself by speaking, though not without after-reproaches from a conscience that was

almost too delicate. 'I would rather help you to bear troubles than I would be without them, Dick dear.' That had meant 'Tell me your secret, because my heart is brimming over with love for you, and I shall not mind blame if I am scolded and you are spared!'

Poor little mother, who had pains and worries enough already, yet longed, as some folks long for personal gains and luxuries, to be allowed the privilege of suffering for her boy!

And Richard, without putting the knowledge of all this into the form of definite thought, yet thrilled to the heart with sacred gratitude for this gift of mother's love that God had given him.

The day might come when contact with worldly minds would make him ashamed of every other reverential, docile senti-

ment; he might drift further and further away from the secure shore of home and home influences—but whether he became only a good-for-nothing, or a regular scamp as his father sometimes prophesied, so long as Mrs. Broughton lived on she would have power to draw him back again, to keep him 'her boy,' to summon every good instinct his heart held to the fore, to aid him to become the man she thought him.

We are told that God's gifts are equally distributed, that the sufferers have their compensation, the poor their reward for poverty; and we know that the blind receive a capacity for self-help, are taught to see with their finger-tips, while the eyes of the deaf see more than other eyes. Little Mrs. Broughton, unable to stand alone, with a body racked by pain, nervous as a child, whose hands trembled

if they held a vase of her favourite crimson roses, whose head throbbed till every nerve was weary—she, in her weakness, had God's compensation, another kind of strength, a power that the rector, for all his steadfastness of goodwill and muscular Christianity, could not exercise —she held her son back from dangers she knew not of; she controlled, led, conquered him; in all the rebellion of his young self-sufficiency, he bowed his head before her superiority, and dreaded the punishment of her tender, ignorant, hero-worship.

Mother and son were still talking together when Anna came into the room.

'I am very glad to see you, Dick; I was beginning to think that you had quite deserted us.'

He sprang up from his seat on the edge

of the couch, and caught his sister's hands in both his own, laughingly drawing her into the light of the shaded lamp, that he might scrutinize her face, after kissing it.

'The "mater's" been telling me that you've grown handsome, Nan, and that you're playing shuttlecock with poor Hedworth's heart.'

'Oh, Richard! I cannot be responsible for such interpretations.'

Anna blushed a little, as a girl was supposed to do when her lover was mentioned, but she was not really confused by the turn of the conversation.

'Mother would not have said that, Dick, so I need not question her. Have you quite done staring at me, bad boy?—You have changed, you look older.'

'Of course; you didn't expect Father Time to show mercy to me, did you?

We've all heard that the rolling stone didn't gather any moss, but never that it escaped being scratched and battered. You and Hedworth have been flirting in the drawing-room, I heard; has he gone?'

'We were arranging about the hymns for Sunday. No, he has not gone, he is staying to supper.'

Richard groaned mockingly.

'And when the meal is concluded, for which one of us at least will be truly thankful, I shall be asked to favour the company with an account of "modern Germany and Spain, the habits, customs, and peculiarities of their inhabitants, and the morals deduced from these by a young man on his travels."'

'Is it not natural that we stay-at-homes should want to hear about your adventures?'

'My dear, couldn't you say "isn't" instead of "is not," just to make me feel at my ease?'

The mother laughed at the chatter of her children; it made her feel young herself.

'You're still a tease, Dick.'

'We'll strike up a bargain,—I won't tease you about Hedworth if you'll stand between me and the pater's catechism for this one night, Nan? Tell him I'm too tired to be questioned, that a railway journey has put my brain in a whirl,—that I've a cold, or the "rheumatics," or ague, ... no malady could be worse than the old boy's probings.'

The last sentence Dick had spoken in a low voice.

'Can you not realize that father is both fond and proud of you, Richard?' pleaded

his sister, in a whisper, as they went out of the room together. 'He asks questions because all that concerns you is of interest to him. You never have given him credit for one-half his real kindness; you prepare to object to the first word he says,—I know you are in one of your defiant moods to-night, or you would not have called him "the old boy."'

A hearty laugh from Dick rang through the quiet corridors of the rectory.

'That shows that "I come with the heart of my childhood home!" You ought to be glad I'm so little changed, Nan!'

CHAPTER V.

Maycross appreciated the Reverend Philip Hedworth, and Maycross was likely to keep him; he had no personal ambition, throwing all the fire of energy which burns in every heart into the cause for which he did his daily toil, for the routine of which he had infinite patience as well as enthusiasm; and that cause was God's, not his own. Neither had he superior relatives who might desire his worldly advancement, nor wealthy friends with livings to dispose of, who might consider that he

would grace a higher niche in the Church.

And he, in his turn, was attached to Maycross, not only because Anna Broughton lived there, but for quite a host of other reasons. There were at least a dozen special cases among the poor which occupied his special care,—characters whom he was nursing tenderly, trying many kinds of treatment, in the hope of bringing them back into healthy spiritual life. Often his cures went wrong when he had begun to rejoice over them, but no number of relapses could make him despair of their ultimate success. It was characteristic of Philip that he never despaired of anything. And he was the most modest of curates, for he was always convinced that the satisfactory cures owed nothing at all to his ministrations, that had he been away they would have re-

ceived the care they needed for their development, that the grace within them had accomplished the result. He had even gone so far, in one or two cases, as to tell Anna that all the good had been done by some more than usually excellent sermon of the rector's.

For those sermons Philip had unbounded admiration. He could not preach eloquently himself, he said, because his college training had been cut short for pecuniary reasons; and he had never got over his surprise that he, so insignificant a man, should be an authorised interpreter of Supreme decrees.

With this excess of natural modesty it was strange that there should not have been persons ready to affirm that the curate was playing a part; it was the most convincing proof of his absolute sin-

cerity that he never feared this imputation, and maybe it is true that the accusation a man never dreads is never made against him. In olden days, heroes of the sword were sometimes of such proven courage that they could laugh at a charge of cowardice, and be sure of hearing the laugh echoed; but Philip Hedworth's position was superior, for he had not even to laugh at any expressed doubt of his sincere modesty. His was a weak character in some ways, and he knew it. He had been at Maycross ever since his wife's death, having come there with the new weight of loss upon him. Several times in those early days he had broken down, of overwork in a former curacy, the rector said, but of sheer boyish sorrow in reality. The married life, with its ever-increasing worries, with the growing ex-

penses, the darkening shadow of past debts and coming illness, the very alarm for the future, the knowledge that 'something must be done,' had been as near perfect in its happiness as a man such as Philip Hedworth ever expected life on earth to be. The sorrows and anxieties had not been borne alone,—that, in his opinion, had been enough to change them into joys.

There are a few natures who do not stay to ring the gold of blessings, but accept them on bended knees, and count them with amazement at their number. The debts were all paid now, Philip had no more pressing anxieties, for his two children had their Aunt Grace to be a mother to them, and he had long ago begun to thank heaven for these new gifts which had come in place of the old. They

were not of half the value of the old, but he thought that no reason for neglecting thankfulness. When a man is resolved to be grateful, he has never far to seek for a cause.

About a year before Richard Broughton had left England, Philip Hedworth had begun to realize that Anna was more beautiful and more good than any other woman living. The discovery had surprised him, which fact was more complimentary to dead Rose than to living Anna. He had wished to speak to some one about the discovery, and had just made up his mind to make her brother his confidant, when Richard, who had been home for a few weeks, left again, to visit other parts of Europe. Philip, unable to confide in his own sister, on account of a certain want of sympathy in her otherwise excellent

nature, not desiring until he knew more of his own feelings to disclose them to the rector, and having not another creature to whom he could unbosom his doubts, was thrown back upon his own meditations.

Weeks passed, and taught him to respect his growing love; months went by, and he began to wonder whether he had any chance of winning Miss Broughton's affection. Having found out that the prize was probably too glorious a one for him to be blessed by obtaining it, man-like he wanted it all the more.

Gradually he began to see new beauties in her character,—his spiritual eyes being opened to appreciate the intellectual, as his human eyes were to note the physical, charms of this tall, fair, handsome woman. He told himself that his dear dead Rose would have loved this girl had she known her, would

have leant upon her, trusted her, admired her heartily. Which was equivalent to saying to himself that Anna was the superior of dear dead Rose.

People who believe that one love is enough for a life will see in Philip's second attachment a sign of weakness, yet it was in one way an undeniable sign of strength. As a boy, he had loved to his utmost,—as a man his love had grown;—Rose, had she lived, would have grown in love-capacity also, probably being to him all that Anna could be now; but a dead wife lived in his regard as she had been when death took her beyond his reach,—a gentle, timid, often tearful girl. Anna Broughton was more, she was a woman; and Philip Hedworth had become a man.

He was so certain now that he was going to ask Anna to marry him, that he had not

the same need of a confidant; yet he had looked at returned Richard with great interest, hoping that the young fellow would be his friend. Philip was shy of new friendships, so if Dick needed to be cultivated as a stranger first, the confidences would still remain untold. But Philip thought that he perceived the same Richard underneath a new Richard, and was glad of it.

The first night of Dick's home-coming had given the curate no opportunity to make advances to him, excepting in the way of interjecting a word in his defence once or twice, when the rector had been severe. The catechism Dick had dreaded had taken place, Anna not having been able to defer it, and discrepancies between Dick's own account of how his time abroad had been spent, and the account contained in many letters of the former tutor in

whose charge he had been travelling, were naturally provoking to a father who regarded a lie as a kind of moral attempt at suicide.

'The man who dares to lie dares any sin,' said the rector. 'No man who cared for the safety of his own soul would murder his conscience by untruths.'

The blackest of sinners would have been encouraged to believe in redemption, had such a one applied for advice at Maycross rectory; but the son who came home, honestly meaning to do better, but trying to cover old sins decently with . . . oh, with any excuse or tale, so long as the covering was adequate, . . . that son was held to have given evidence of utter callousness and of a resolution to persist in evil courses.

That night discussion after supper had

taken place in the library, while Anna was practising hymn-tunes on the harmonium in the drawing-room; and though Hedworth had tried his utmost to escape to her society, his rector's express request had made him an auditor to a conversation in which there had been no harmony.

Question after question had the rector asked his son, answer after answer Richard had made, and all his words had been checked off as true or false according to the statements contained in his travelling-companion's epistles. Often forgetfulness, inaccuracy as to dates on the young man's part, had made him seem to lie when he was only blundering, but his attempts at explanation had made matters worse instead of better.

Finally, the rector having proceeded to a few general enquiries, Richard had pro-

ceeded to general retorts, and had ended the catechism by striking his clenched fist upon the table and vowing passionately that, as he was no longer baby but man, he refused to confess his shortcomings to any one who could not believe also in his virtues and good intentions.

'If I go to the devil,' he had shouted, 'I'd rather have myself to blame than you, sir.'

Often had Richard's temper betrayed itself before in that same room, the rafters of which had rung with his threats and defiance, but never before had he left it when commanded to remain.

When the door had closed behind him, the rector had sunk his grey head on his hands, and Philip, from the background, had not known for whom to sorrow most, the wild young fellow who was seemingly

bent upom destroying the promise of his life, or the old man who saw in that son only the evil which his duty obliged him to denounce.

'Sir . . . my dear sir . . .' the curate had said, but then had paused for want of eloquence and self-assurance.

'You may go, Hedworth, thank you,' the rector had answered.

Then, as Philip had walked the short distance to the cottage which was his home, he had resolved that, please God, he would win Richard Broughton's confidence by the gift of his own. Not that he believed that he could do Dick much good, but there is always a chance that Providence, meaning to accomplish a conversion in some heart, may employ a seemingly unworthy instrument.

Philip's way of putting it to himself ran thus:

'It would be strange indeed if I were to succeed where the rector fails, but then the way in which goodness works is often strange and incomprehensible.'

CHAPTER VI.

Twenty-two hours had passed since he had made his resolution, and Philip, sitting by his little girl's cot, had a firm belief that Richard would come to-night to see him, in response to a note of invitation he had ventured to send him.

The rector was doing the coal club accounts without his curate's assistance, because Trot had a feverish cold, and Grace was out, so Philip and his children were alone in the cottage.

The cottage was very quiet; sometimes

Trot moved, tossing out heated hands, or moaned a little in her sleep; then the father would lay his firm fingers on her wrist or shoulder, murmuring some soothing words, or even trying to hum the tune of a lullaby. Sometimes the window-curtains would rustle mysteriously, as the night wind tried to push them inwards, or a nightingale would sing a few bars of his song from one of the old elms round the church-yard.

Philip looked well in his own home. Anna would have seen nothing to regret in his appearance at the moment, for though the china-headed doll lay on his knee, its presence was sufficiently excused by Trot's proximity.

Presently she began to sleep more easily, and Philip rose to answer a knock he thought he had heard at the door of

the ante-room; the hall-door was standing hospitably open. His hearing had not been at fault, for Dick was come.

'My dear Broughton, this is good of you. You have taken pity on my loneliness, as I hoped you would.'

'I don't refuse a man's invitation unless I dislike him,' said Richard, brusquely, 'and you said Grace was out.'

'Yes, I am all alone, with Trot; Jerry is sound asleep in his room. Let us sit here and smoke—I know you like tobacco.'

Dick threw himself into a cane-backed easy-chair by the long window, the door of which was ajar leading into a kitchen-garden, and filled his pipe from the packet of tobacco which the curate smilingly offered him.

'What a fraud you are, Hedworth, to talk as though you meant to follow my ex-

ample. You know you think nicotine inclines a man to depravity.'

'No, indeed I do not. I might smoke if I were a rich layman.'

'How's the little girl?'

'Better, but still feverish. Forgive me it I have to listen now and again when I fancy I hear her voice; it will be no hindrance to our talk. Most of my work is done in the evenings, when my sister is often out, and when I have the little ones in charge.'

A whimsical look came into Dick's eyes as he watched, through his tobacco smoke, the simple face of his host.

'I've often thought of you while I've been roaming, Hedworth, and I've always pictured you under these circumstances, with these surroundings.'

'Naturally,' said Philip, 'the surround-

ings of a widower. Trot will be delighted to welcome you back; you are one of her heroes, and she doesn't forget friends, though she is little more than a baby. It was exceedingly kind of you to come to-night, Broughton; I can offer you no entertainment, but—' he hesitated, and the puzzled expression came into his eyes which sometimes made him seem dazed when preaching—' but I wanted to ask you all about yourself, not of your travels only—of what you mean to do rather than of what you've done.'

' That's a good thing,' laughed Richard. ' or you'd run the risk of being unpleasantly like the pater. I could find it in my heart to bear you malice for having been present at that idiotic scene last night, only that I feel I had the best of it. Loyal to him you may be, but for God's sake, man,

own that he behaves like a fool to me, or you'll drive me into the conviction that all clergymen are humbugs.'

'There is no need for such hot words. You can't expect me to call my rector a fool.'

'I said he behaved like one, and so he did.'

'In my opinion your father made a mistake, was too severe. If he asks me, I shall have to tell him so, though no man could admire his earnest character more than I do.'

'Bravo! You're my friend! or you wouldn't have owned so much.'

'But you had better not ask me what I think of *your* conduct!'

Philip smiled at the culprit, who was enjoying his tobacco. Dick was in an excitable mood, as his flushed face and shining eyes

attested. He leaned forward to answer, speaking emphatically, watching the effect of his words.

'Don't you understand that I haven't a fair chance in life, that I'm handicapped by having been born a Broughton, and reared in the stifling atmosphere of a rectory? Would it be anything but just if I went to the opposite school on getting free of this one? What if I did? Say that I've learnt wisdom, experience, commonsense in the school of modern life, am I not better off with the knowledge than without it? I know now what the World means, after hearing it reviled every Sunday regularly. I know how to compare good with bad. If I choose the good now it will be through knowing the bad, a choice with my eyes open; I shan't submit tamely

to duty because I don't know the attractions of . . . the opposite.'

'The opposite, as you call it, has no real attractions, Broughton.'

'Have you ever tried it?'

Philip shook his head.

'That's not the point of view I like. Good heavens, do you suppose the devil doesn't know his own business? It's noble to fight against temptation, I admit that, though saying so does sound like Sunday school; but it's weak, not noble, for a man to sit down and say, "I'm good, because I don't want to be anything else."'

This was exaggerated, and Richard himself knew it, feeling that he had placed the right of the argument on Hedworth's side.

'Temporary, false attractions, the—the

opposite to duty may have, Dick, but no real attraction,—nothing to offer that a man's common-sense, apart from the religious point of view, would lead him to accept at the cost of his own self-esteem.'

'A slave comes as near being a beast as a man can, and why?—because he's considered no better than one.'

'True.'

'Shall I ever be regarded as anything but a black sheep, a solemn warning, a good-for-nothing, a reprobate?'

'Yes,—as a son, by a mother for whose sake alone you should be great,—as a husband perhaps some day, by a good woman who will put all her trust in you.'

Richard threw himself back again. After a long silence, he said, in a less excited voice,

'You're a queer fellow, Hedworth!'

The curate, unaware that he had shown any sign of queerness during the past quarter-of-an-hour, interpreted the criticism as being delivered against his whole career and character.

'I often say the wrong thing. Have I done so now?'

'The question might be answered truthfully both by yes and no. When I find the "good woman," supposing that I haven't already found her, what do you imagine the pater will say to her?'

'Surely he will welcome her, if she be what you say?'

'Good, eh?—My worldly wisdom teaches me to doubt it! However, leave me alone for to-night, and tell me about yourself.'

'Myself?' Hedworth was startled by the demand, though he had been prepared to

make his secret known to Richard. 'There is not much to tell, except that I love your sister.'

Dick gave a roar of laughter that would have been disconcerting to a less self-depreciating friend than Philip.

'Of course I guessed that years ago, but the miracle of the matter, to my opinion, is what in the name of wonder you can see in the girl *to* love? She is stiff, ignorant,—oh, you needn't look daggers at me, I'm only saying what I've said to her face often;—altogether she's a feminine edition of her father.'

'A brother is not a fair judge. You could tell me nothing of her—her good qualities that I do not know already, and I cannot——'

'Admit that she has any bad ones? Well, man, if that's your frame of mind I

hope you'll be happy when you've got her, and not find out her fallibility. I'm a trifle soft-hearted about Anna myself, against my better judgment, and because she's my sister; if she were any other fellow's sister I should hate her.'

'As much as you dislike mine?'

'Grace? . . . . oh, come now, we're getting too personal! . . . . Grace isn't coming home yet, is she?'

'She promised to be back by half-past eight.'

'And it's twenty past now. I must be off, Hedworth.'

'So soon? I hoped you would take supper with us.'

'Awfully kind of you. I'm sorry to refuse, but you know I'm frank if not polite, and I can't endure Grace, not even for your sake, old man!'

Dick had risen, and was standing with outstretched hand before the curate.

'And you will have me for a brother-in-law, if my hopes are fulfilled?'

'They will be. Anna couldn't be such a fool as to think twice about accepting you, and the pater will say "Bless you, my children," in his finest preaching tone. *You're* not in his black books, luckily for you!'

'My secret I have shared with you, when will you share yours with me, Broughton?'

'I'm not sure I've got one.'

'You're not willing to say that if you have it does not concern me?'

Philip eyed the younger man wistfully as he suggested this possible state of his mind.

'No; I'm not, for you're the only creature alive I would tell, except . . . . the

mother, and she doesn't look up to bearing the burden of a secret at present. The fact is, Hedworth, it's not easy to take up the old ties all at once,—if I care for anyone it's for a girl of this county, whom I haven't seen since my wanderings. She may have forgotten me, or she may have left her heart with the old Richard, who's dead as a door-nail,—dead and buried.'

'No one else can see much change in you, Broughton.'

'Don't want them to.—Here, take this, Hedworth, it's for Trot, and there's something in the other packet for the little chap. . . . . Ah, here it is—and give 'em both my love.'

Philip was alone before he could thank the rector's son for the toys which were on the table. Richard, having heard a step

on the gravel, had rushed out of the house, without waiting to be shown to the door, and was away, over the garden fence, before Grace Hedworth had seen him.

She was not like her brother, either in appearance or disposition, and her manner to young men was the outcome of her sincere distaste for their society.

As she came into the parlour now, she sniffed the air, and glanced at the disordered cushions of the arm-chair, at the tobacco-packet, and the crushed antimacassar.

'Richard Broughton has been here then?'

'I was sure he would come, Grace.'

'I thought he would not, but then I cannot be expected to know his reasons for cultivating your friendship. Take care he does not embroil you with the rector, that is my advice.'

Laying her bonnet and gloves aside, she began to tidy the room, then went upstairs to brush her smooth fair hair, which seemed never to really require that attention. Philip sighed. In all his plans for the future Grace had a place, and he tried to persuade himself that she and Anna would live together in amity. When both were good, why not? But a vague weariness which came over him when Grace was more than usually 'sensible,' when her suspicions of everybody and everything seemed unbearably bitter, made him realise that even goodness does not make a woman lovable.

Strictly speaking, no one could find fault with Grace; she was admirable as guardian to the children, as a housewife, as a Christian. Was it her fault or her virtue that she was sure to perceive the

shortcomings of man or woman? As she herself said, 'Blind confidence tends to destroy honesty;' but then it is an open question whether being doubted has ever made any human being honest.

Out in the mellow night air Richard threw back his head and laughed, with amusement born of the thought of Grace Hedworth's indignation at his abrupt departure. The genial vagabondage of Dick's nature exulted in the solitude of lanes and fields at this hour when the labourers were at the public-house and the women at their cottage doorways. It was easy to avoid passing homesteads; he had learned how to traverse miles without meeting any person face to face, or running the risk of being recognised from windows. This was one of the arts on the acquisition of which he prided himself;

and there was an undeniable attraction about the freedom of his bye-paths, short cuts and detours, owing partly to his knowledge that he was trespassing.

It is to be feared that Richard had a deep-rooted antipathy to the respectable, and as strong a liking for the shady paths of life; but to-night, could his friend Hedworth have seen into his mind, Dick would not have blushed for either thought or purpose. He was intent upon finding out whether 'the good woman' had forgotten him, whether the spell of her presence would enthrall him as it had power to do two years ago, whether he could feel that her influence could make a creditable man of him.

Hedworth would have approved all this, though his rector would not have done so.

A long tramp brought Richard to the river-bank, at a point where a tiny boat-house stood among the reeds.

On the wooden wall of the building an inscription was painted, to the effect that 'any person wanting to hire a boat at sixpence an hour must apply to Jonathan Lodge, at Mill Cottage :' and a ghastly-looking device of a hand with three fingers outstretched, pointing inland, signified that Mill Cottage was visible among some willows and birches not far away.

But Richard took no notice of the inscription ; Jonathan Lodge knew him well, and had accorded him special privileges which had not been revoked since the boy had become man. Dick had a key to open the boat-house.

There was the *Merry Jane*,—named after Jonathan's baby daughter who was now

grown-up and serious;—the planks were painted a lively green, picked out with scarlet scroll-work along the edges, and a union-jack of home-manufacture and washing was lying on the narrow seat. Holiday-folk sometimes hired the boat, who would have felt that it was deprived of a necessary adjunct if the flag had not fluttered on its diminutive staff, but Dick preferred the boat without adornment.

Having launched his vessel he began to pull steadily up stream, past the curate's cottage, the church, and the rectory, having taken his long walk merely for the sake of securing the boat, as in it he could go through the heart of the little town without being noticed by a single neighbour. Once under the bridge of the High Street, away from the narrow line of light cast by the one gas-lamp, he was in

the welcome darkness again, among the reeds and sedges.

He was getting excited, though he had made up his mind not to be; eager, anxious, though he had resolved to let his emotions depend upon the course of an event that had not yet occurred. Rowing quickened his pulses, exhilarated him, and had the effect of strong wine upon a nervous constitution. Poor Dick! his mother's delicacy had not been without influence, as yet unsuspected, upon her son; he would have laughed the idea to scorn had anyone suggested that he, the champion oar of his rowing-club, noted at college for his powers as a batter, enthusiastic athlete that he was, had need to guard against over-exertion or excitement; but the strong muscles might relax some day; the noisy heart had done its best work.

Rebellion against circumstances of daily life is a tiring crusade; still more tiring is the task of learning cynicism. Richard would never be sufficiently calm for a cynic, sarcasm was all that could be expected of his constitution; and now, in the invigorating night-air, he was full of hope, of longing, of life; forgetting that, two hours earlier, he had determined that never again would he believe in the rich promises, the happy faiths, which a young sanguine temperament teaches the boy to discover in the immediate future. As a man it was his business to be philosophical, to expect nothing, he had told himself—passionate aspirations were only fit for youth; but the stars, the moonlight, the whisper of the willow branches, the glittering wavelets under his boat, the solitude, the stillness of the night-world,

had deadened the power of worldly wisdom. O God, what a fair earth! What wonder if Hope lived on it?

And with Hope had come Longing,—a vague discontent had grown into a hot desire for Love, that love which is pure and perfect, which has breathed in all the true romances of all the ages, beginning with that idyll of Eden which a Creator blessed!

Romance was in Dick Broughton's heart, and Reality was by his side. On the banks of the river were the gaunt walls of manufactories—now that he had passed out of Maycross into its environing country—and the backs of squalid houses with yards sloping down to the water's edge. In an outlying street was the 'Four Stars,' the public-house that the rector was

going to close, where Captain Purvis gathered together the socialists of the county. A meeting was taking place to-night, the last one in that building, and Dick caught an echo of a cheer from hoarse voices.

The boat sped up the river, and soon the houses became scattered, stretches of meadows lying between along the tow-path which led to the distant town of Huntstown. Then a cottage came in sight at a bend of the bank—a low, two-storied building, whose whitewashed walls caught the equally white light of the moon, and made a mark in the landscape.

Richard pulled his boat into the rushes, grasped with a trembling hand the shelving side of the bank, and, detaching some loose pebbles, flung them at one of the latticed windows of the cottage.

He could hear his own heart beating in the stillness as he watched and waited for an answer.

The river gurgled among the reeds, and a water-rat scudded past the boat.

Dick threw some more gravel, and whistled softly.

Then a light showed behind the white blind, a girl leaned out of the window, boldly facing the tell-tale moonlight.

'Dick, is it you? . . . Oh, you've come. You've come at last! I wouldn't run after you, dear, but I'm glad, *so glad!* . . . You've come back the same, after all?'

'Yes, Mattie.'

'Father's at the meeting,—and Becky's too deaf to hear, so you can talk for a few minutes. Richard, you're taller, . . . your head comes higher up the wall than it used to!'

'Mattie, you're *lovelier*, I can see that by the moonshine!'

And had the curate heard the thrill in the voice of his friend he would have sympathised, so great a bond of union is romance. In his eyes, dazzled by Cupid's moonshine, Anna too was lovelier than she had ever been, for beauty grows in exact proportion to the growth of the lover's passion. Hedworth might have been puzzled by the knowledge that Richard Broughton had chosen Mattie Purvis for 'the good woman' whose influence was to remodel the wasted substance of his life; but then Richard could not imagine 'what, in the name of wonder, any man could see in Anna.'

These things are inexplicable, but no doubt love's moonshine has a great deal to answer for.

CHAPTER VII.

THOREAU, the great stoic, taught, or tried to teach, men and women to become rich by limiting their desires; but, though the recipe may be excellent applied to earthly gold, it is not to be carried out satisfactorily if the formation of happiness is contemplated. A man may, by making up his mind that worldly wealth is mere dross, persuade himself that it is not worth grieving for, and so gradually cease to covet it; but every man desires happiness, and will continue to desire it so long as

life lasts. Some try to gain happiness by the sacrifice of self-will, some consent to suffer and toil in this kingdom—all praise be to them!—yet they take pleasure in the thought that by present self-denials they are laying up for themselves rich treasure of joy in the kingdom where nothing is transient. God was merciful to human nature when he bribed it.

Anna Broughton did not desire gold, but she had often longed for happiness, temporal as well as eternal; and the longing had been a blessing to her. Without it, daily contentment would have palled upon her. The happiness she wanted was different from the happiness she had, as a brooklet is different to the ocean; the joys of to-day were placid, peaceful, and to be counted upon, whereas the joys of that possible future were to be strong, deep,

unfathomable, ever varying, ever new, ever entrancing.

She did not say this to herself in her thoughts, for she was not fanciful; the whole desire was a part of her nature rather than of her character, which latter had been moulded by circumstance rather than by inner inspirations. There are many living men and more women who are in this manner what their surroundings require them to be, instead of being true to their inner selves; and, probably, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the fact is an advantage to themselves and to others. Culture, which has changed a wild-rose into a greenhouse 'Maréchal Niel,' can effect wonders, but as strange a metamorphosis may be noted any day by a close observer of the result of custom upon human creatures.

If a friend had asked Anna whether or not she was satisfied with her life, she would have replied, with honesty as well as with pride, that she delighted in it.

Was she not the rector's daughter? Besides this advantage of birth, she possessed good health, freedom (as much as any well-dispositioned girl could require), a certain amount of authority in her father's home and in the parish, affection for her family, intellectual tastes, and lately she had discovered a new possession in Philip Hedworth's love.

No wonder that the girls of the neighbourhood envied Anna! A few times in her life she had been stirred to a depth in her heart which was usually covered by contentment; but those moments of strong feeling had not left any conscious want behind them. Until the want was given

a name, Anna would not recognise it. Those few times had occurred when her emotions had been appealed to by some cadence of harmony, some fine sentence in a book, some great manifestation of beauty in nature, or by some religious ceremony. The choir singing the Christmas hymn had done the work once; another Christmas the song had been without mysterious inspiration for her ears; one moonlight had been palpitating with some spiritual glow that no other had since owned. But none the less was there a longing, undefined but deep, in this girl's nature; and, when the desire was made manifest to her, she would attain her womanhood. It might take the form of holy renunciation, of ambition, or of love, or it might never declare itself; all the same, it lived in her life, and gave her dream-seconds,

inspirations of charity, and thrills of reverence.

While Richard Broughton had visited the curate, fled from Grace, walked and rowed miles to find out if a child of the people had forgotten him, Anna had been occupying herself very much to her liking. That evening she had received a letter announcing the coming to Maycross of a school-friend of her own, and, besides the letter, a box of new books had been taken in to the rectory. Both had been sent by Barbara Morne, and were addressed in her square handwriting.

At first the letter had pleased Anna best, and she had turned to an investigation of the books out of a sense of duty; for they were intended for the Maycross library, which was under her management, and she knew that no sooner were

they added to the somewhat meagre catalogue than all the young women in whose welfare she was interested would carry them away for mental assimilation. The few story-books of the library were almost worn out through their popularity, and still were eagerly accepted for third and fourth perusals. No new volume could be given to those ravenous readers until Anna had considered it with scrupulously severe criticism.

In the silence and solitude of her bedroom she had been sitting since tea, forcing her mind to work instead of letting her thoughts play round the exciting news of Barbara's intended coming. Two volumes had passed the ordeal of her judgment, when she took up a third, and forgot to ask herself every five minutes whether the author had succeeded in the

difficult task of writing an altogether unobjectionable tale. As she read, her letter fluttered to the floor, and lay there unheeded; her upright attitude unbent, the hours passed without being regarded by her. As the dusk of evening increased, she moved mechanically nearer the window, and held up the page to catch the last sunset light. Not until the pink glow faded out of the sky, and darkness made the printed lines before her eyes indistinct, did Anna realise that her cheeks were wet with tears.

Springing from her chair, she dashed her hands across her face, and drew herself up as though to reassert her independence of character; for never had she felt the least patience with a girl who sat stooping over the pages of a novel! But there may have been stronger character in that story

than was in Anna herself, for she succumbed to its spell again, lit the lamp on the little table, and, while the unholy light mocked the gathering moonbeams, sat, with her head bent on her fingers, reading, reading, reading,—no, *living another life!*—until at the tragedy of imaginary despairs and deaths, she sobbed and trembled; to rise up again less self-assertive—humbled, frightened, conquered.

Her longings were still unspecified, but they had drawn new life from a story which had been written with a soul's blood. Anna, with the ignorance she could not help, had imagined that only by visiting London and 'going into society' does a woman learn to know the world; but now she was undeceived. This story had been about country folk, young creatures had played their drama of life among scenes of

rustic simplicity, had been themselves old-fashioned, yet had loved, been tempted, felt the passions of great hatred and great faith. Their lives had been part of Anna's unknown world, as surely as though they had lived in Mayfair and sojourned in such wicked places as Paris and Monte Carlo.

And she, Anna, might any day find that uneventful routine does not prevent experience of the heart, might awaken some morning to an existence which should be as full, as bewildering, as strong in opportunity for sorrow or ecstacy as this author had seen that human life can be. Before, if she had ever imagined herself the heroine of stirring situations the rectory and Maycross village had always seemed impossible scenery; she had felt that nothing strange would ever happen while she lived at home and taught the Sunday

scholars. Now her ideas were changed; she understood that some supreme tragedies can be played on a minute, a common-place stage.

Would this wonderful fulness of knowledge come to her? Was she destined to face the joy that stings with the dread of loss, and the loss that widows the heart? —would she, Anna, pass through the wilderness of uncertainty, where the misty atmosphere chokes even the soul and deadens the glow of the light of lights? Would she grope her weary way through the land of denial? Would she nōt be conquered if ever temptation came to her in the guise of perfect happiness? Could it do so? Could she ever feel with that mad keenness? Some inner self told her that she would not be safe through any incapacity for emotion.

And this was life, this knowing how to feel.

The sound of a closing door downstairs roused her into recollection of the routine which had lost its character of security. She felt her flushed face, tidied her ruffled hair, in shame that she had learned so much; yet was grateful for the enlightenment, would go back to the book again and again, hoping to draw more from it,—would soon begin to despise her old self for having been so innocent. Indeed, Anna had learned nothing which would have been better unlearned; the story was one with pure ideals and of truthful, judicious, charitable tone. It had preached human love to her, and that wide kind of affection is not harmful.

As she stood, listening, the flame of the lamp began to flicker and die down. This

trivial occurrence made her realize how late it was, how long she had been engrossed in the novel.

Tidiness was one of Anna's virtues, but she did not stay now to put away a single book, but hurried downstairs conscience-stricken. In the hall she met Richard, who had just come home.

'Hullo, Nan!'

'Dick . . . have you had supper?'

'No, but it doesn't matter. A still tongue is a sign of a wise head, old girl, so don't let the pater know at what hour his prodigal returned. I'll do without supper for once.'

His sister came close to him, held him by the arm, and looked him in the face. Richard was not quite sober, though not a drop of intoxicating liquor had passed his lips that evening; he had drunk of

Hope's vintage, until, in his young credulity, he believed that no sorrow would ever be sufficiently powerful to subdue his sense of exaltation, no trial be able to shake his confidence.

The moonlight, combined with a girl's smile, a few sentences exchanged, a promise made and echoed, these had brought Dick to this glorified state of foolishness.

'*Richard*,' cried Anna, 'I haven't had supper either! What *will* father say?'

The sublime is always dangerously akin to the ridiculous, and as these two young people a moment ago had been thinking great thoughts they now began to fear small perils. A common dread of parental scolding made them sympathise.

'Why, it's past ten o'clock. Old girl, you must have been writing Hedworth a love-letter.'

'No, indeed, Dick, I was only looking over the books for the library; but time went fast, and I had no idea that it was anything like supper-hour. Mary must have rung the bell too gently.'

'*You* can't sneak off to bed supperless like a culprit, Nan, so we'd better put a good face on the matter and go and eat.'

The rector took many of his meals in his study, not caring to be disturbed when working, often only joining his family for dinner; so the brother and sister were able to avoid the questions he would have asked to-night had he known of their unpunctuality.

Anna was more of a companion to Dick than she had ever been before; she herself found him more lovable than she had thought him. They chattered gaily in

whispers, laughing over their escapade,—for, according to rectory notions, this late supper was nothing less,—Anna forgetting to be shocked at Dick's noctural wandering.

He gave an account of his visit to the cottage, painting in vivid words the picture of Hedworth sitting by his child's cot.

'Nan, that fellow's a good sort, and I do hope you're going to be kind to him. Good heavens, I wish I were like him!'

'Richard, I never heard you express such a wish before.'

'Because I never had it. There are changes in my character that would amaze you if you found them out; but you see, old girl, we've never been used to chumming together, you and I; you've always shared the governor's opinions, which are not flattering where I'm concerned.'

'Has it been my fault alone, Dick?'

'Did I say it had? No, but when you are caught tripping, Miss Propriety, when you forget your household affairs because you've chanced upon a novel, then you come down to my level a bit, and we get on famously.'

Anna pursed her lips together and began to reflect. If it was true that she was encouraging her brother to practise a deception upon her father then indeed she had been 'caught tripping,' and deserved to have the truth revealed to her with unpleasant distinctness. Richard began to deteriorate in her opinion; his reckless gaiety seemed less innocent, his relish for the good food and ale no longer pleased her. She watched him with eyes which sought faults, and she wondered where he had been so late? Surely not at Captain

Purvis's meeting? Surely not in any public-house? Years ago he had patronised a billiard-saloon in Huntstown, she remembered.

'If you have finished your supper, Richard, we had better go and say good-night to father.'

Her tone of voice was so different to the one in which she had spoken a few moments earlier that Dick looked up in surprise, to find that the change had not been confined to a tone, but was of her whole manner and bearing. This was the Anna whom he regarded as not half good enough for Hedworth.

'You will do as you please, of course, but I'm not going near the pater to-night; it's bad enough to endure his society when necessity compels, without going to seek it. Am I a baby that I should trot into

the study for the sake of saying "Good-night, dear papa?"'

Richard had altered also, and Anna felt yet more vexed with herself for having countenanced him in his lateness. She remembered that novel-reading was always supposed to produce bad results in a home, and made a virtuous resolution not to re-read that particular story, as she had fully intended to do.

'Father will ask me where you are if I go to him alone,' she said, rising from the table.

'Tell him I'm in my room, which will be true by the time you've got to the study.'

'And mother?'

Richard gave a hard laugh.

'Don't you bother about interfering between the mother and me, there's no need

until I begin to neglect her. I saw her before I went out.'

Some of the light had faded out of his face, but, as he ran lightly up the stairs, it began to kindle fires in his eyes again; and he had to check a whistle which would have betrayed him to the rector.

Anna sighed, and went at once to the study.

'I have come to say good-night, father, but I would rather stay if I can help you in any way. Have you not finished the coal club accounts yet? It was very annoying that Mr. Hedworth had to stay at home this evening.'

She drew a chair to the table beside her father, and rested her cheek for a second against his coat-sleeve.

The rector smiled upon her, laying aside his glasses for the purpose.

'You ought to be at rest now, my child, or what is to become of your beauty-sleep?'

'I did a very foolish thing. I forgot all about supper, because I was busy, and did not hear the bell. To-morrow I must scold Mary for not ringing more loudly.'

'That was unlike you, Anna.'

'Yes. Can I help you?'

'The work is done, dear. By-the-by, where is your brother?'

Anna blushed.

'In his room.'

'Ah—not playing truant to-night? I'm glad of it. Of all my anxieties, and my days are clouded by them, the greatest has to do with that boy and his future. He seems determined to disgrace me; every new discovery of his evil conduct I make warns me against placing the least trust either in his honour or his common-

sense; and this last rumour . . . if it be true . . . but true it probably is . . . Why not . . . when all the others have been proved true?'

The elderly man was speaking out of the fulness of his mind, more to himself than to Anna, who did not understand him; but a startled question from her roused him.

'Father, is there any new trouble about Richard?'

'Eh, my dear?—There will always be new trouble about him.'

'But anything that I may know may help me to influence him. I will do my utmost, if you will trust me, father.'

'It is scarcely a question of trusting you, Anna, for you are aware that I have always felt confidence in your discretion; only the matter is a delicate one, and you,

being a girl, may . . . Well, I will tell you, in case you should be worried more by the doubt than the knowledge; and it concerns one of your *protégées*, too—that is another reason. The fact is, my dear, that when Dick went away I had good cause to be angry with him for his rebellious disposition and his boyish wrong-doing; but now he has come back a man, and as rebellious as before, I have grave fears for him. To-day a friend warned me that Richard was formerly much with that rascally fellow, Purvis, and used to show his daughter attention. Now, if Richard tries to continue his friendship with a man who is my enemy because he is the enemy of my parishioners, I shall be obliged to forbid it, and if he dares to . . .'

The rector paused impressively, and Anna exclaimed, in dismay,

'Oh, father . . . do you mean Mattie?'

'Purvis has only one daughter, as far as I know.'

'And she is . . . pretty; at least, she is considered so. She is not a pupil or a *protégée* in whom I take any pride, for she is too impetuous to work well, and she is not always nice in her manner to me. I have tried to think that her ignorance is to blame for that, but in many ways she is clever.—Father, what can you do if Dick . . . falls in love with her?'

'He shall not have the chance, my dear; they shall not meet.'

'Can you prevent it?'

'This is not an occasion for doubts of the kind, Anna; I *will* prevent it.'

'But how can you know whether they meet or not?'

'I have ways, my dear, and you can

help me. I don't ask you to spy upon your brother—that would be unworthy of us both—but you might question him about where he goes, and whom he speaks with. Now we will dismiss this most unpleasant subject of conversation. Is there not something you want me to do for you to-morrow afternoon?'

'To call with me upon Mr. Calkin, father, if you can spare time. Barbara says in her letter that she will arrive quite early in the morning, so surely we might go after lunch? I am anxious for you to know her,—she is so bright and clever; and while she stays with her step-uncle she will be one of your parishioners.'

'That is true, my dear; I will accompany you with pleasure. Mr. Calkin is not a favourite of mine, as you are aware, but he pays his pew-rent though he comes

lamentably seldom to church, so I need not boycott him on that account.'

Anna laughed dutifully, though her father's jokes were apt to be ponderous.

They went upstairs together, and paused on the landing.

'Good-night, father. Perhaps it will be better if I do not disturb mother so late.'

'Very good, you are always thoughtful, my dear child. You are looking unusually bright to-night; what is the cause? Excitement about your friend's coming, I guess?'

'I am dearly fond of Barbara. I do hope you will like her, father.'

'Not if she is a talkative fashion-plate. But there, I promise to do my best for your sake; only my girl must not let herself be made worldly and discontented because *she* cannot roam over foreign lands.'

'There is no danger of my feeling discontented, I hope, father.'

'You have certainly no reason. Good-night again, my child, and God bless you.'

CHAPTER VIII.

The novel was still lying on the table in Anna's bedroom, but she did not open it, rather avoiding its neighbourhood, as though she were not sure that her good resolutions were strong enough to resist temptation. The other books she replaced in their box, all but the two which she had approved as fit for the perusal of young persons. As she moved them she found Barbara's letter lying where it had fallen from her lap half an hour ago, and she read it again, smiling with pleasure.

Barbara was a heroine to Anna.

Their acquaintance had been one of the results of two years' study together, at a finishing school at Brighton; while the friendship which had followed had been maintained almost exclusively by means of the post, Barbara having been out of England travelling for pleasure. Once Anna had seen Miss Morne, when the latter had had occasion to pass through London on her way to Scotland; but an hour's interview between friends who have grown strange to each other is scarcely as satisfactory an opportunity for friendship as letter-writing affords. That hour had sped fast, Anna had left unsaid all the warm sentences of affection she had planned to speak, and had found Barbara awe-inspiring. Miss Broughton was her friend's elder, but no one seeing them together would have

guessed it; for while one girl's was a finished nature, the other's was undefined, if not in the matter of principles assuredly so as regarded sentiments.

Barbara's letters had a literary flavour that Anna admired, that made them at once superior and inferior to most girl-epistles; they were not to be counted upon, another enhancement of their charm, but arrived at irregular intervals and were of irregular lengths, sometimes mere notes, at other times crossed and recrossed pages of description, anecdote and reflection, which required careful reading, and deserved the earnest thought that Anna always paid them.

Formerly Miss Broughton had regarded Miss Morne as one for whom great things might be expected, not only great successes but great trials, temptations, and possibly

great happiness. With simple truth to the friendship, doing her very utmost for the dear friend herself, Anna had prayed, morning and night, that Barbara's heart might remain unspotted from the world. To-night the prayer did not seem quite so necessary, though it was not omitted; for Anna had learned that a crowd does not make life, nor a city constitute all the world of any importance. Considerable was the enlightenment which had come to her in this one day; she no longer believed that a rector's daughter is never severely tempted, that villages are unfit backgrounds for romances, that London holds all the broken hearts of men and women; she had been playing a not unimportant part herself in a romance of the existence of which she had been ignorant; she had felt all the passion of a tragedy that she had read.

Trying to forget the tragedy, because it was contained in a 'novel,' Anna's meditations hovered round the romance in which her brother was the chief actor, while Mattie Purvis's share in the performance remained a doubtful quantity.

Anna blushed for them both,—for the young man whom she had always considered as a boy, for the young woman whom she treated as a wilful child. Then she blushed for herself, because she knew that Dick's attachment might be a very serious matter.

Mattie was pretty, certainly,—Miss Broughton was obliged to admit this, after recalling to memory's view the dimpled rosy face and gipsy hair and eyes. And Mattie was either greatly to be blamed, or else was absolutely innocent of any wish for Richard's admiration. But here medita-

tion had perforce to strike into two different channels, caused by two suppositions,—for if Mattie were the bold bad girl Miss Broughton was inclined to think her, then Richard was exceedingly foolish; whereas if Mattie were merely silly, flattered by a gentleman's attentions, then Richard was the more culpable.

No wonder the rector was anxious!

Anna began to speculate about the future. She was not wise in worldliness, but she understood that a flirtation is one thing, and a serious love affair another, and in this case an infinitely worse one.

If Richard were earnestly in love he might persuade Mattie to marry him against the opposition of his family; that would be a distressing climax, and Anna's heart beat fast with the excitement of imagining the stormy scenes at home which

the marriage would occasion,—how Mr. Purvis would insult her father, and how her father would tell Richard never to enter the rectory doors again.

Or if Richard were only amusing himself and Mattie thought him in earnest? then Richard might be responsible for a girl's broken heart? Or what if Mr. Purvis were encouraging the foolish young people, in order to revenge himself upon Anna's father?—the motive of revenge being of course the closing of 'The Four Stars Inn.' Again Mattie might be amusing herself, she might wish to boast of having won the love of the rector's son and heir?

And supposing gossip should take up the question, and the neighbours, in as much doubt as to truth as Anna herself, should hold as many different opinions as

the case allowed, how could Anna bear to hear the echo of all the chattering, how could she support the dignity of her position, when asked for a true account of the unfortunate idyl? It seemed that life was no longer to be a placid routine of tolerably pleasant duties.

Supposing, last but not least, that there should be a scandal? But Anna refused to consider this supposition. Her face grew hot, her heart felt stilled, at the appalling idea that scandal was possible.

She was not pleased with herself as she thought over the events of the day, for she had let her better judgment be twice set aside by impulse; once when she had read the novel by the light of a lamp long after supper-time,—secondly, when she had forgotten to blame Richard for keeping late hours.

Her conscience was very uncomfortable as she considered this latter mistake. Where had Dick been? Why had he come home with that radiantly bright face? Mr. Hedworth would not have kept him all that while at the cottage without offering him supper, or sending polite excuse for detaining him.

Ought she not to have told her father that though Richard was 'in his room' he had only just gone there? Instead of which she had helped Dick to keep his secret.

A firm resolution grew out of the recognition of a lapse from duty, as firm resolutions have a habit of doing.

'Never again will I shield Richard,' said Anna to herself; 'I will be true to my father's confidence.'

Then she allowed herself to think of to-morrow's excitement, the coming of

Barbara to Maycross.—Dear, clever, brilliant, perplexing girl!—'We shall grow to understand each other as we have never been able to do before,' thought Anna, happily. 'I may even be able to ask Barbara's advice about Richard.'

When she fell asleep it was to dream, as Miss Broughton had never dreamed before,—to wake many times and blush in the friendly darkness at the recollection of the strongly-written love-scenes of the novel,—to meet the morning light a new creature, seeing in it a summons to new life, realising that existence had gained a fuller flavour, bewilderingly sweet and possibly intoxicating.

Anna had just sipped that draught of Hope's vintage of which Richard had drunk deeply.

CHAPTER IX.

Reginald Calkin, Barbara Morne's step-uncle, lived at the Hollies, a mile and a half out of Maycross, and was an object of interest to no one in the county.

The hollies were fine trees, but the house and estate to which they had given their name showed no remarkable feature, and could not be called important. Eight bed-rooms, dining-room and drawing-room, and the usual kitchen, scullery, etc., etc., —this was the best description of the house the Maycross auctioneer had been

able to invent; but the gardens, having run to ruin from a gardener's point of view, were charming enough to have merited eulogies.

But Mr. Calkin himself loved tidiness without practising the virtue, so saw no beauty in a wilderness of trees, shrubs, flowers, weeds, and moss-grown paths; he was in the habit of taking his daily walks up and down the carriage-drive, which was kept in good order.

In the Hollies Reginald Calkin took no pride, because it did not belong to him, nor could he bestow it upon his kinsman, or step-nephew, Barbara's brother. The owner, an eccentric bachelor, was living in Africa, and had left his house in Calkin's charge for Calkin's lifetime, subject to many limitations of authority, and according to a code of definite instructions.

Now, as Calkin had only a few hundred pounds a-year from an annuity, he could not afford to expend much upon a home where he was but a life-tenant.

No one in the county cared for Reginald Calkin, and he, in his turn, cared for no one. He might die on the morrow for all anyone would care,—he might leave Maycross, and not a question would be asked respecting his destination,—he might walk through the village all day on market-Wednesday, and not a creature would turn a head to look after him. The fact is that gossip must have something to take hold of, and Reginald Calkin's personality presented no obtrusive points,—his was a smooth nature and an even life.

When Maycross learned that a young lady was coming to the Hollies, people began to consider Mr. Calkin relatively,

because he was the step-uncle of the strange young lady, and was of importance in that connection if in no other. They decided that Miss Morne was to be pitied; for surely her fortunes had come to a low ebb indeed if she had to put up with a residence in Mr. Calkin's home? And no travelled young lady, who wrote books, could possibly be coming to the Hollies voluntarily. One of Miss Morne's books, an early work full of long sentences and irreproachable sentiments, was included in the Maycross library, so she was already known to fame locally.

The Ruggles, Kate and her mother, discussed Miss Morne's personal appearance, coming to the conclusion that she would be tall and thin, and would wear spectacles; but, as the stranger passed from the station to the Hollies in the shelter of

the one closed 'fly' the village owned, they were not immediately able to verify their prognostications. Before lunch-time the Ruggles had heard a different description, but, as two ladies had arrived at the Hollies, no one could be sure which was Miss Morne. One was little, dark, and plain, the other was little, fair-haired, and not very young. Kate thought the latter must be Miss Broughton's friend, never having heard her age, for a literary lady could not be a mere girl.

Anna knew what to expect, having on the mantelpiece of her bed-room a photograph of Barbara, besides having a very clear recollection of her charms; but she was anxious to see her friend again, to find out whether or not she had changed. Travelling is undoubtedly ageing, but country folk credit it with the power of

wrecking constitutions, as well as occasionally re-making them. Richard had travelled, and he had come back from foreign lands so much altered that Anna feared for Barbara.

All that morning Richard's light-heartedness and gaiety had delighted his mother, in whose room he spent many hours; but his sister could not shake off the impression left upon her mind by her father's words of the preceding night; she saw nothing but audacity and recklessness akin to rebellion in Dick's high spirits, heard nothing but impudence in his laughter and jokes.

Since Richard had behaved so ill on that memorable night of his home-coming, when he had declared his intention to refuse replies to catechetical examination, the rector had treated him with severe

politeness. No confidential words ever passed between father and son; they both looked and listened for evidences of the other's ill-will. At lunch Anna made conversation to which the rector replied, while Dick ate heartily, smiled over his own thoughts, and put in a remark now and again to show that he was quite at his ease,—which remarks were not always addressed to Anna, but to the father. They were answered with stiff courtesy, were sometimes made the excuse for small homilies, to which, it is to be feared, Dick seldom listened.

After lunch the rector retired to his study to write some letters, and Anna, feeling excited and frivolous, went to her room to dress for the visit to Barbara. Of Barbara's step-uncle, of the friend whom Barbara had brought with her, of Bar-

bara's brother, Anna did not think at all, —her best clothes, the grey alpaca, kid gloves to match, and black lace scarf, her Sunday hat, her new boots, these were donned out of respect for her dear, clever, worldly-wise friend alone.

This heroine-worship made the prim, judicially just Sunday-school teacher, the counsellor of the poor, the virtual mistress of the rectory household, the manageress of the Mutual Improvement Society, into a different creature. Anna was used to ruling others, to having her opinions respected, but dear Barbara was a stronger individuality, and never respected opinions the value of which her own experience had not estimated. Barbara ruled Anna when they were together; this had been but seldom, so far, and Anna felt, without exactly thinking the thought, that Bar-

bara's near neighbourhood and frequent company must effect a species of revolution in her own life and character. If a book, a novel, a love-story, had had power to shake Anna's convictions of her own immunity from temptation, was it not probable that Barbara's conversation would shake many other convictions she had cherished with equal care? Anna did not forget that Barbara was a maker of novels, though, strange to say, those works, by the author's express wish, had never found their way to the rectory bookshelves.

Being ready for the walk before her father had finished his letters Anna crossed the room and stood by the hearth, gazing meditatively at the portrait on the mantelshelf. It was the photograph of a girl whose face was spoiled by the com-

pression of full red lips. The attitude of the head was haughty, and haughtiness is unbecoming to a small woman; the expression of the half-closed dark eyes was disdainful; the daintily curved neck, the rounded contour of the cheek, the ripples of the curled hair, the general effect of perfectly finished features, was charming enough to have satisfied an artist; but a physiognomist could not have forgotten the unfortunate trick, the squeezing together of those lips, which had been meant to smile.

The gossip who had told Kate Ruggles that the younger of Reginald Calkin's visitors was little, dark, and plain, had made a mistake upon the whole. Country critics of beauty do not admire it in the miniature as a rule, and Barbara Morne was not what is called 'a fine girl.'

Anna saw no fault in the face of the photograph. She gazed at it with the most honest admiration, wishing that she herself had one tithe of Barbara's wit and style. Anna, with Barbara's features, would have been plain, if the exchange can be imagined; it was Barbara's *style*, her bearing, her manner, her air, her absolute symmetry and finish that made her appearance successful.

Only it was true that the 'finish' had been over-perfected: had Barbara been a trifle more natural she would have been lovely as well as lovable.

'Anna, I am ready!'

'So am I, father.'

Miss Broughton hurried downstairs, her heart fluttering with anticipation; and joined the rector in the garden.

The walk was through pleasant lanes,

where honeysuckle laced the hawthorn-trees together, and woodbine silvered the hedges with gray-green leaves, which caught the sunlight; in a month or two those leaves, with their silver reverse sides, would be hidden by the brighter show of pearl-white blossoms. On the banks trailed ivy, grew daisies, buttercups, and blue 'bird's-eye,' while the fields beyond the hedges showed the wealth of a wet summer's hay-crop.

The rector loved country sights and sounds, though he had not much patience with the slow wits of country people; often he paused to point with his stick to some grass that needed cutting, or was being cut too soon, to the blue haze quivering over the distance, to a new plantation of firs, or a lark rising cloudwards. Anna, fretted by these delays, tried to

appear tranquil, knowing well that all her own principles, as well as her father's, were opposed to allowing excitement to influence temper.

At last the gate of the Hollies was reached. The rector smiled kindly at his daughter.

'Wheel-marks in the gravel, my dear, a sure sign that your friend has arrived, for Mr. Calkin has no visitors as a rule. I hope Miss Morne will come to church on Sunday, for all the parish knows you are intimate with her, and her absence from service would set a very bad example. You might let fall a word of caution,—it would come well from you.'

'Oh, I am . . . I mean Barbara will surely come.'

'Is she naturally of a religious disposition? Many persons are not who obtain

religion, but others are predisposed towards it from their birth. I found no fault with the tone of that little book of Miss Morne's that you have in your library.'

'I believe Barbara is very good in her way, father, but I do not know if it is just our way. She is charitable, there are many poor friends of hers who owe her a great deal.'

'That is a good point in any young woman's character,—charity.'

As they stood on the door-step awaiting admittance the rector asked in a whisper,

'Is she wealthy, Anna?'

'I think not. The father left his money to Barbara, her brother Basil, and their half-brother, Reuben Drive, but it was not a great sum, I believe.'

The rector wanted to question further,

but had no time, as a man-servant opened the door and led the way to a drawing-room at the back of the house.

The Broughtons had been in that room before, and had thought it dreary, but to-day its character was altered. A garden hat with white ribbon strings had been tossed into the arm-chair; a mass of roses, red, pink, and yellow, covered the shabby cloth of the centre table; a pair of gloves, much the worse for wear, lay between the hideous china vases on the mantelshelf; and the top of the old-fashioned piano was heaped with music, some pieces of which had fluttered to the floor.

Anna, smiling as she saw this disorder and guessed that Barbara was responsible for it, noticed an open song on the music-stand. It was a patriotic song for a baritone voice, and a name, 'Basil

Morne,' was scrawled in blotted letters across the margin.

In days to come Anna remembered that Barbara's brother had first been recalled to her mind by the sight of that signature. Before, she had, of course, known that he existed, but the idea of his personality had never engrossed her thoughts.

He was a member of Parliament, and the private secretary of a Cabinet Minister.

Now she began to wonder what manner of man he was? Her wondering was cut short by the entrance of Barbara. A lithe little figure glided through the open doorway. With both hands outstretched, and lips raised for kisses, Anna's friend greeted her.

'My dear . . . my dear, with all my heart I am glad to see you!'

Her manner was intentionally 'pretty,' yet the prettiness was caused by really warm feelings. Barbara could no longer help being theatrical. By her carefully chosen and spoken sentence of welcome she had meant the sentiment which most young women would have expressed by 'Oh, you dear old girl, I'm awfully glad to see you!'

Anna returned the embrace, then blushed for fear her father was secretly ridiculing her excitement.

'Barbara, I've brought father to see you.'

The two little hands went out again, this time to the rector.

'Dear sir, I can't feel that we are strangers, for Anna's letters have told me so much of you!'

'And my girl has told me a great deal of you, Miss Morne. I trust you may be

happy at Maycross, and stay our neighbour for a considerable time.'

Anna's appearance had suddenly become 'dowdy,' and the rector, without thinking the womanish word, noticed this. Barbara was untidy, while Anna was neat, but then there was nothing countrified about Barbara's nearly worn-out dress.

'It was so good of you both to come and see me on the very first afternoon; and I am all alone. Ah, I should have apologised earlier for uncle's absence. He has gone into Maycross. My dear Anna, how radiantly well you look. I am a perfect wreck, the result of tearing through Europe. No doubt you have been a great traveller in your time, Mr. Broughton?'

The rector had never been further than Paris, but he was pleased by Barbara's assumption.

'No,' he said, 'no, we clergymen are very much tied. I have often thought that it would be a great treat for me to visit . . . well, Egypt for instance.'

'Ah? Antiquarian lore, mummies, pyramids, etc. etc.? I have done all that. We spent winter at Alexandria. Ceylon I preferred, and Burmah. But really, scenery apart, the poor old world is terribly the same; human nature consists of a few types only, and those are mostly wearisome wherever met with!'

A shrug of the shoulders ended Barbara's words. While she had been talking she had offered Anna and the rector armchairs, and now threw herself carelessly into the corner of a huge black-covered sofa. Leaning on one elbow, her slim fingers pushed aside the loose curls of her brown hair,—curls which formed a mass

and could not be distinguished one from the other. From under long lashes she watched the rector and Anna, forming fresh opinions of her friend, and guessing at the character of the father.

Her feet, clad in old theatre-slippers, elegant but rather worn, dangled easily,—her lips had the compression which had spoiled their shape in the photograph in Anna's room. The rector had intended to make some semi-playful speech to this young authoress, for though he had read none of her later books he had heard that her works were widely popular; but he found himself not as ready with words, felicitous phrases, as he would have wished to be,—so the conversation could take no brilliant turn, and consisted principally of questions and answers.

Barbara's last remark had called for a

reply Mr. Broughton thought, and, after a pause for reflection, he answered it.

'I am sorry to hear you speak as though you had but few friends. A young and . . . . pardon me . . . . agreeable young woman, ought to take pleasure in society. Probably you find that gaiety is fatiguing both to mind and body . . . .'

'*Gaiety*? . . . . Is there any genuine gaiety left in society?'

'You mean that the social round is a duty?'

Upon that phrase, 'the social round,' he prided himself; it sounded worldly-wise; and most men who have spent their lives in the country desire to be regarded by their friends as 'men of the world.'

But Barbara's laugh was a trifle disconcerting.

'I don't trouble myself about social duties, I assure you! Anna knows that

I rank myself among the Bohemians!'

'You prefer the nobility of intellect to the nobility of rank in those whose acquaintance you cultivate?'

Barbara hid a yawn, and smiled across at Anna.

'My brother has to cultivate all sorts, because he is political,—agricultural labourers and dukes particularly. He will run down here sometimes, so you'll know him soon. Perhaps you and dear Anna will see more of us than you may wish,—we appreciate real kindness, Basil and I. However—I mayn't stay long in your neighbourhood.'

'I assure you, my dear Miss Morne, that you underrate *our* capacity for appreciation,' said the rector, somewhat stiffly. He was beginning to suspect that Barbara was laughing at him.

'Oh,' said Barbara,—'that is a compliment. How very good of you.'

Mr. Broughton thought that never had he met a girl who was so strangely careless, yet so unnatural in manner. Good man, he was not particularly keen-witted; all his cleverness ran in the groove of duty, to which he had directed it ever since his early manhood, but he was not as stupid as Barbara considered him. There are many kinds of dulness, and not the least rare is the character which is conscientiously dull.

Miss Morne, herself genuinely clever,—but paying her talents away in very small coin for fear generosity should fail to win her the admiration she craved,—with an elastic conscience combined a desire to acquit herself finely at all times. A very wearying desire, this!

Occasionally her natural indolence made her shirk the labour of pleasing, so that towards the end of a conversation she was often less agreeable than at the beginning.

Carrying about her continually a sense of her own superiority over others, she sometimes revolted against the display for others' edification of those airs and graces which, at moments, seemed a part of herself, but which were in reality wholly artificial.

Animals, strange to say, when much petted, frequently show the same inconsistency; a lap-dog will, one day, keep his eye on his mistress, exhibiting all his amiable tricks and fawning upon her, and, the next day, will appear to have tired of demonstration.

CHAPTER X.

Anna, whose eyes had been so fully occupied in the delightful task of gazing upon her friend, now timidly broke into the conversation.

'I mustn't forget to thank you for sending me all those books for the library, Barbara.'

'Frankly, my dear, I hoped *you* would have pleasure in them—I didn't care so much for the amusement of your Class. Young women of a low rank in life are too fond of romance as a rule, and should

really be kept to grammars, histories, and geographies.'

'Quite right,' said the rector, quickly. 'All girls have too much imagination, particularly girls of low rank, as you said, Miss Morne.'

He had been reminded of Mattie Purvis.

'But they have not much pleasure in their lives,' suggested Anna.

'That is quite a delusion, dear—a Bank Holiday outing, a penny novelette, a new ostrich-feather, a smile from some odious young butcher or baker, these are quite enough to put them into the seventh heaven of delight.'

'Some of my girls are like that, but not all of them, I trust.'

'My dear girl, *don't* trust anyone—it's a mistake now-a-days. I'm sure your father,

with his experience of human nature, will give you the same advice.'

'H'm . . . I do not counsel blind belief, certainly not,' said Mr. Broughton, dubiously.

'Ah, here comes coffee,' said Barbara. 'I thought you would prefer it to tea so soon after lunch. And here is my friend and companion, Miss Hilda.—Miss Hilda Brown is her real name, but we never call her by it.'

Anna and the rector looked through the open doorway which gave a view of a long length of corridor. From the distance a quaint figure was approaching, robed in pale pink muslin, with white bows on the shoulders. This was the lady who was 'small, fair, and not young.'

She came into the room shyly, smiling

from one person to another, as though to express the catholicism of her good-will—friends and strangers alike might be sure of it; her hands were full of ox-eye daisies, whose petals tapped her lined cheeks as she walked, and had ruffled a few strands of her grey-streaked hair. There was a sweetness, a dependence as of youth, a humble desire to please, withal a wistfulness in the expression of this elderly Ophelia. Her eyes had a certain vacancy of look too, not suggesting madness but a forgetfulness of the way Time had checked off the years of later life for her. A girl's romance was still in her heart, so Time's incontrovertible account she never reckoned up to a sum total.

'Barbara, dear, I hope you have not wanted me?'

'No, you are in time for tea, and in time

to see my friends, the rector and Miss Broughton.'

'Anna Broughton!' cried Miss Hilda, eagerly, clasping the girl's hand without losing hold of the armful of daisies. 'My dear, you are my sweet Barbara's confidante, it would be strange indeed if I did not recollect that!'

For the rector Miss Hilda had three timid fingers and a half-curtsey, not to mention a vivid blush which often troubled her when she conversed with gentlemen.

Seating herself primly, with well-arranged skirts and hands demurely folded above her wild-flowers, she smiled again confidingly upon the company.

Barbara had contrived to cross the room to Anna's side, having signed to the servant to set the coffee-table there; so the rector and Miss Hilda were left to a *tête-à-tête.*

Mr. Broughton was fortunately never troubled by a lack of subjects for the foundation of small talk, and the little lady, who expected 'the gentleman' to inaugurate conversation, was greatly flattered by his cordial manner. She afterwards told Barbara that 'Mr. Broughton had condescended to be extremely entertaining.'

Miss Morne gave a nod of approval at Anna, signifying her satisfaction at having given her father occupation.

'Now we can chat. My dear, let me begin by complimenting you upon your fresh appearance. I am tired out, jaded, harassed, infinitely weary. Basil tells me I'm over-sensitive,—but then Basil, though a genius in some things, isn't infallible! I fancy myself that I may recover in time, but meanwhile!—pity me!'

'You must have been doing too much,' suggested Anna, vaguely.

'My writing, eh? Oh, that is so cynical, it rests me. It is real life, not sham, that takes the spirit out of one.'

Anna looked distressed.

'Are you really cynical? I cannot believe that,—you have always been so kind to me.'

'If I had been kind that would be a sure proof, for all the kind deeds are done by cynics! But, my dear, you can have no idea what a satisfying friend you are.'

'I am very, very much delighted that you think me so!'

Barbara laughed, and laid a small ringed hand on Anna's knee.

'What discussions we will have while we are together! You shall teach me the secret of your placidity, and I will teach

you wisdom,—the wisdom of the serpent, you know,—that is all you can expect from such a worldling! And Basil shall sing to us both, when he is in the humour, which will not be often!'

'It will be exciting,' said Miss Broughton. 'I am very dull as a rule.'

That she had learned this was due to Barbara's demoralising influence.

'Poor dear! I have often wondered what you do with yourself! I don't mean the hours of the day, they are easily filled of course with Bible-meetings and plain sewing, but how you can find enough to fill your soul! I suppose your soul isn't awake yet, and slumbering infants don't need feeding;—its powers of emotion have had no call made upon them by the irreproachable curate. My dear Anna, forgive me, but I abhor irreproachable persons of

all kinds, but particularly irreproachable young men!'

'Mr. Hedworth is certainly very good, but I should not call him irreproachable.'

Barbara was quick to discern a forbidding gravity in Anna's tone.

'No? I am relieved to hear it. *I* nearly married a curate two years ago—some curates are delightful creatures, I admit. Did I tell you about him? He was the one who taught me a little Greek in Switzerland.'

'I remember well,' said Anna, who would have considered herself a faulty friend if she had not taken profound interest in Barbara's experiences. She had indeed often wept over Barbara's letters, whereas that young woman herself had shed never a tear for the love-affairs themselves. 'He met you first at a private

concert, a musical party, in Paris, and then followed you to Switzerland. I wondered whether you had not made a terrible mistake, whether it would not have been for your happiness to have married him.'

'He was a capital companion, but he had a curacy in Wales, and a mother who lived with him.'

'Yes?'

Barbara considered that her explanation had been sufficient, but Anna failed to understand it.

'Well,—I couldn't live with a mother-in-law in a cottage in a Welsh village, could I?'

'Surely you could, if you had loved him?'

'Then I suppose I didn't.'

'Then it was all for the best,' said Anna, with a sigh of relieved apprehension.

'The curate was not half as admirable as Mr. Chester,—did I write to you about him?'

'Yes, but not as much as about the curate. He was older, a great traveller.'

'My dear, I did lose my heart to him, but he disappointed me, so I got it back.'

'Oh, how was that?' asked Anna in a whisper.

Miss Hilda was laughing gently at the rector's anecdotes; and Barbara was not averse to self-discussion with her admiring friend.

'I found that his passion made him despicable. He was not worldly—he hated novels and flirtation, and thought theatres dangerous, particularly French ones; he was engaged in a 'good work,' some scheme for converting Africans and stopping the slave trade. He spent his

days and nights in toiling for the good of humanity, and sacrificed his private fortune as well as his own comfort. People raved about his wonderful goodness, his eloquence, his invincible courage and determination—and I, really, *I* believed in him!'

'Of course you did. He must have been a splendid character!'

'Oh, remarkably splendid! He began by despising me for my frivolity, then he tried to convert me—then he fell in love, and the inspired prophet died; and out of his ashes rose a new man, who didn't care what became of heathens, so long as his own self gained the object he desired,—which was me!'

'I am very stupid, but I don't quite understand, Barbara.'

'I admit that I led him on, but then I

cared for him ; I would have married him, in spite of his niggers, if he had remained true to himself. When he proposed for the third time, I asked him if he would leave missionary work and patronise theatres and race-meetings instead, for my sake—and he promised, with tears in his eyes! The affair sounds nonsensical, but it was a sacrifice from his point of view.'

'And you could not respect him any longer. I do not wonder. He was not worthy of your regard, dear.'

'Oh, I didn't care about the niggers, you know, it was his want of will I loathed. No, Anna, I was punished for being credulous. I shall never marry, unless I can find a man who is strong-minded enough to disapprove of me consistently, and tell me so!'

The little theatre shoe, which was peep-

ing from under Barbara's frilled skirts, tapped the floor impatiently. There was a contemptuous smile on her tightly-closed lips; while Anna looked genuinely distressed.

'My poor dear Barbara, don't be angry with me for saying that I do so hope you may be very happy some day.'

'Hullo, what has worked the change? Your last letter contained a sentence to the effect that girls ought not to want to get married,—you were preaching that text to the young women of the parish?'

'I seriously fear that I have changed, for the worse,' said poor Anna, colouring painfully.

'Not at all, my dear, you've only been getting more human. Who was it said that sinners are more interesting than saints, because sin is the hall-mark of

humanity? It was either some Frenchman or Basil.'

'Mr. Morne is very charitable perhaps?'

'Basil? Don't call him Mr. Morne. Well, he's a man of the world, which means the same thing. He wouldn't call a spade a spade, for instance, if he thought it would hurt the spade's feelings,—unless he was feeling spiteful. Basil is sure to like you, my dear, you are so delightfully fresh. I shall bring him to see you soon, for of course I shall run in and out of the rectory just as I choose. Now I suppose I had better do the polite to your father; he's a very handsome man, in his own style, and I think he knows it.'

But the rector, though as susceptible as most people to adroit flattery, was not won by Barbara's complimentary attentions suspecting a certain capacity in that young

woman for double-facedness and ridicule, he noticed the rare moments when she rested from the toil of fascinating and showed a cynicism which if not part of her nature was so habitual as to seem so. Those moments, rare though they were, chilled the satisfaction her cordiality gave, and made him credit her at last with less real cordiality than she possessed. The fair deceiver whose occasional deceits are discovered must expect to be judged capable of nothing but deception, for mental generalization enters into most character analysis. Mr. Broughton prided himself upon his ability to read a man or woman through and through by a glance; but his philosophic eyesight usually missed the inmost heart and its half-acknowledged impulses. To him a human being was either good or bad—the latter to be con-

verted, the former to be rejoiced over, and for the majority,—those who wish to be the one and only contrive to be the other, or those who are accounted bad but are better than the good if rightly understood,—he had no pigeon-hole in his comprehension. Barbara, who swung backwards and forwards between right and wrong, touching both points but resting at neither, could not fail to be an enigma to him; and therefore was distrusted.

Anna felt displeasure in the air as she walked home beside her father. Nervously she stole glances at his severe face, wondering whether silence were golden, or whether it were wiser to address him.

He solved the difficulty by speaking himself.

'Well, I have seen your friend, my dear, but I cannot say that I approve of

her. Beware lest she lead you unconsciously to follow her into the dangerous paths of worldly life. You are my daughter, Anna, and I hope I may never have to say that you have disappointed me.'

This solemn harangue made Anna wonder.

'I hope not, father. I can see that Barbara is a little spoilt; but she has a very good heart.'

'Naturally you desire to defend your friend from criticism,—I should do the same myself in your place; and I do not ask you to see less of her; I merely express a hope that you will not forget that you, my child, can have little in common with these . . . these worldlings!'

Anna remembered that in the novel great events occurred in a village as old-fashioned as Maycross, in an atmosphere

as pure as that of her home, and as apparently far removed from all the warm influence of passion and ambition. And what else but passion of one kind or another can make any event great to mankind? The passion of avarice makes the miser's gold-chest all the world to him, the passion of love glorifies into greatness the possession of the little brass ring some tramp places on the dirty finger of some factory-girl; the passion of noble longing dignifies any poor effort done by its guidance. Anna, looking at the world through newly-opened eyes of charity, saw that the apparently little may be sublime, the apparently calm be the mask worn over an anguished life. In her present exalted mood she felt to have much in common with every living creature, so why exclude these 'worldlings?'

But the next instant reminded her of Mattie Purvis, and of her brother Richard; bringing her down at once from lofty charity to personal want of sympathy. Here was one instance of undesirable romance. Her opinion of the whole world was narrowed down to it in a second.

'I will not forget your good advice, father,' she said, glancing at her parent with reverence again. 'Perhaps I may be able to persuade Barbara to see things as we see them. I acknowledge that I felt influenced by her just now,—she is very captivating,—but when I have grown accustomed to seeing her I shall not be affected by her in the same way.'

The rector nodded his approval.

'Right, my dear. You have always shown a very proper disposition, and I do not want to lose my best helper in the

parish. You have to set an example to others, remember, as well as fulfilling your home duties.'

'This evening I shall ask Richard to help me classify those books for the library, father. He will not refuse; and when that is done I will persuade him to take me for a row on the river.'

Again the rector approved, and congratulated himself upon Anna's docility and usefulness.

CHAPTER XI.

Years earlier the rector had refused to give old Mrs. Drinkwater a joint of Christmas beef unless she earned it by going to church and listening to his Sunday sermons; and ever since then an enmity had existed between 'parson' and parishioner.

On fine Sunday mornings the aged dame sat in her front garden and read the Bible, proclaiming in this way both her Christianity and her independence. On wet Sundays she repeated the same programme in her little front parlour, the window of which

was close to the street. On week-days she always sat near this window.

Every man, woman, and child of Maycross knew her and gave her greeting as they passed; all this public attention flattered her, but she was best pleased by the salutation which Mr. Broughton, when he went by, could not well refuse her. She would return the bow with the light of triumph in her smiling eyes, and all the wrinkles of her face taking malicious curves.

'Parson's not got over me yet,' she would mutter to herself on these occasions: or 'Parson thinks himself a fine fellow, but he don't hoodwink Maria Drinkwater!'

She was the one irreconcilable member of Mr. Broughton's fold,—for he counted all the Christians of Maycross who were

Protestant by birth as belonging to that fold;—but this old woman defied him openly every Sunday of the year, and rejoiced in being singular.

The matter of the Christmas beef was her principal cause of offence, but smaller causes came into operation as the years went by. She was a cousin of Captain Purvis, and championed both him and his socialism, merely to vex the rector. For the same reason she petted Mattie and instilled rebellion against patronage into her youthful character.

Mrs. Drinkwater saw Mr. Broughton and Anna walk out together on the afternoon of their visit to Barbara Morne; she guessed their destination, noticed all the details of their costumes and expressions, watched for their return.

As they passed her window, on the

way back, she parted the crochet curtains and peered out.

Mr. Broughton bowed stiffly, so did Anna.

'Good-day to you, parson.'

'Good-day, Mrs. Drinkwater.'

When they had passed the old woman drew back again, and sank chuckling into her chair.

'Made parson speak though he didn't want to!'

Then she remembered that the rector would be obliged to pass again that night, on his way to a meeting of 'The Young Men's Christian Association,' and her chuckles broke out afresh.

'I'll make him say "Good-evening," parson though he be, an' "Good-night," as a finish.'

Even the life of an old woman, spent

in an invalid chair, may have its excitements. Had Mr. Broughton been obliged to leave Maycross suddenly, no keener regrets than those of Mrs. Drinkwater would have followed him.

Mattie ran in every evening to make tea for her elderly kinswoman, and was always greeted with kisses, compliments, and sweetmeats. This was her god-mother, who had expressed the sage opinion that beauty is only skin-deep.

To-night Mattie was looking very pretty, had put on her best pink cotton-frock, and was more than usually absent-minded. Mrs. Drinkwater noted these facts.

'Dont'ee put salt in the tea, love.'

'Oh, *no*, god-mother.'

'I saw you drop some in the cup, but maybe that was an accident.'

Mattie became penitent at once.

'Did I *really?*—Oh, what a goose I am, I meant to put it on your plate with the watercresses.'

'Never mind, my dear, never mind! Pretty girls will get foolish when they lose their hearts to fine young gentlemen.'

Mattie coloured hotly, then gave her head a saucy toss, and smiled.

'Wouldn't you like to know all I know, eh, godmother? But, though you're always a dear to me, there's nothing quite so sweet as a secret, even from you.'

The old dame winked shrewdly.

'*Let's see it*, Mattie, love.'

'Oh, you've guessed! How could you?'

The girl, forgetful of the claims of tea and bread-and-butter, ran and threw herself on her knees by Mrs. Drinkwater's

chair, laying two clasped hands on her lap, and gazing in her face with eloquent eyes of happiness.

'*Do* say you think he means to be true to me in spite of his horrid old father and Miss Anna, who's as stiff as a poker? If I thought he'd be persuaded to give me up I'd go and drown myself now at once, before he had time to tell me. I love him, I love him, and I'll never forgive those who try to part us!'

The impetuous speech ended in a burst of tears; during which Mattie drew a ribbon from round her neck, and slipped a little turquoise ring into her godmother's hand.

Mrs. Drinkwater patted the bent curly head, surveying the ring meanwhile with satisfaction which was mainly malicious. She was revelling in anticipation of the

time when she would be able to say, 'Now we're kinsfolk, parson, aren't we?' But Mattie soon left off crying and sprang up.

'I mustn't ruffle my hair and make my eyes red, he's coming here to-night.'

'*Here*, my darling?'

'Oh, I knew you wouldn't refuse to help me; and Dick said if we met here it would all look so respectable when it's found out, because he can't announce the engagement for a week or two, until his father's got him something to do.'

'I'd like to see parson's face when he's told, ay, that I should; but I'll see him pass the window times afterwards, for he can't help passing . . . Oh, my pretty dear, you've done a fine thing, you have,—but tell me now, can't you get the young man to put his promise into writing?'

'No, no!' cried Mattie, passionately. 'If he won't be true for love, he shan't for fear. But he *will* be true. He didn't forget me all the while he was away . . . And, oh, godmother, *he's coming up the steps!*'

'Polly's in the kitchen, let her open the door, love.'

A sooty little maiden of twelve years of age made her appearance hurrying down the hall, and presently ushered Master Richard into the front parlour.

Dick's air of confidence as he crossed the room was beautiful Mattie thought, nor was its bravado lost upon the old woman, who stretched out one hand to him with dignity worthy of a queen.

'You're very welcome under my humble roof, Mr. Richard.'

And this was the parson's only son.

'Why, you don't look a day older than you did when I went away, mother,' cried the young man. 'I'm going to marry Mattie some day—I hope she's told you —and we know you'll help keep our secret for a while.'

Very keen were the eyes which watched the meeting of the two young creatures.

Dick boldly took Mattie in his arms and kissed her; then they gazed into each other's gloried countenance. Something of the heart-stirring atmosphere of that moonlight night when he had rowed down the river, to hear a promise whispered from a latticed window, came into Dick's life again as his lips touched the lips of the girl.

'Sweetheart,' he whispered, 'I know I'm earlier than I said, but my sister had laid a trap for me, and, if I hadn't sneaked

out when I did, I should have been obliged to invent some awfully bald excuse for coming. There were piles of books she had got out for me to help her look through, but luckily Hedworth called in to ask about a hymn, and while she was out of the room I bolted.'

'You couldn't come too early for me, Dick.'

'Bless you, my dears,' said the harsh voice of Mrs. Drinkwater suddenly.

Richard threw back his head in a hearty, happy laugh.

'That's the first blessing we've had so far, isn't it, Mattie? and I'm not sure when we shall get the next.'

'Give Mr. Richard some tea, Mattie; the best china is in the corner cupboard under the stairs.'

'Why, you're never going to get out

best china for me, as though I were a stranger, Mother Drinkwater! I don't allow it. There's a jubilee mug on the mantelshelf; mayn't I drink out of that?'

'Twas the parson himself as gave it to me,' cried the old woman, rocking herself backwards and forwards in her delight. 'He little thought that you would come here to drink my god-daughter's health out of it. Oh, it's a queer world, a queer world, but I thank heaven I lived to see this day, and I pray that I'll see the day you two are married. But, young sir, the wedding won't take place in Maycross parish church,—you mark my words. If I thought it would, I'd promise to listen to one of parson's sermons. Ha, ha, ha!'

Dick was sitting on the head of the old-fashioned horsehair sofa close by Mattie. Glancing proudly down at her, he thought

her the most beautiful refined lady he had ever met, and knew that she was the 'good woman' Philip Hedworth had advised him to win. His heart swelling big with the resolution that he would leave off being a reprobate in order to be a worthy husband for her, his eyes suddenly grew dim with tears, and his hands trembled so much as to have endangered the safety of the jubilee mug had he not hastily put it down on the table.

'As God sees me, I will be good to you, dear!'

'Oh, Dick, I know you will.'

His arms went round her again, and her head nestled on his shoulder.

Mrs. Drinkwater forgot her spite for a second in pure sympathy with the romance of this boy and-girl passion; thereby paying love a great tribute.

In order to hide the emotion he could not at once subdue, Dick began to rattle off the history of his adventures, telling anecdotes with such vivacity that he held his auditors' interest spell-bound. The meal did not end for quite half-an-hour, but Dick enjoyed his cold tea and thick bread-and-butter with that grateful appetite which only overwhelming contentment gives.

When he had finished, Mrs. Drinkwater proposed that he and Mattie should go into the garden.

'The parson will be passing in a few minutes, and he might look through the window; but, if Mr. Richard will sit on the wooden seat round the mulberry-tree, his head won't show over the wall.'

'Bless you, Mother Drinkwater!' cried Dick. 'You make me remember with

shame that years ago I used to deprive you annually of a few mulberries.'

'And the parson found out and paid for them after giving you a flogging, young sir.'

'Paid for them, yes; but out of *my* pocket, not his own.'

'And Mattie cried all night about your bruises.'

'You darling, did you really?'

'Of course I did, Dick. I was fonder of you then than of anyone else in all the world!'

'Now go along with you both!' said Mrs. Drinkwater, 'or the parson will catch you.'

CHAPTER XII.

Left to herself again, the old dame turned to face the window, watching for Mr. Broughton's appearance, listening for his step, which her enmity had taught her to distinguish from the step of any other man in Maycross. The children who were playing in the roadway looked at the malicious face at the window and wondered, awestruck, what 'The Witch' was thinking of. Mrs. Drinkwater did not love her neighbours' children as a rule, and knew the name by which they spoke

of her, but to-night the softer influence which had worked upon her feelings made her tolerant. She watched their games smilingly, and when a small urchin 'tumbled down and hurt his crown,' she threw him a lump of sugar by way of solace.

Meanwhile Richard and Mattie, in the shelter of mulberry branches and high wall, sat on the wooden bench and built fair castles in the air for one another; Richard built one for Mattie, Mattie a glorious one for Richard, and they were joint-architects of one named 'Love,' the tower of which touched Heaven, and in which they meant to reside together all their years of life.

Mattie said she had never been out on such a beautiful evening, and Richard declared the sunset finer than any he had seen in Switzerland.

When the sunset faded and cool grey clouds covered the sky, when no shadows lay over the prim garden paths, and moths were about instead of bees, when the evening star twinkled between the branches and the birds were silent, they agreed that the change from day to night was preferable.

'Dick, do you think your mother will be very angry with us?'

The timid question set Dick's heart beating quickly.

'No, Mattie. My mother's just an angel of goodness to me; if she knew what you really are, if you could talk to her, she would love you almost as much as I do.'

'But she can't know me; I can't talk to her.'

'That's the worst of it.—I promised I'd

tell her all my secrets, but I made the provision that she shouldn't hear any that would worry her. But I tell you what we will do, Mattie;—when the pater has been told and is in a rage, as he's sure to be at first, we'll watch for an opportunity when he's out, and I'll take you to see my mother.'

'Won't you be in London, Dick?'

'I can come down. I expect I shall come home one day to tell about our engagement, for it'll look so beastly cowardly if I write the news. I'd go right in and out with it now, this very moment, if it weren't that I must have some work to do, and if the governor were in a rage he might refuse to find me any.'

'Have you spoken to him about work yet, Dick?'

'No, darling, he was out with Anna this

afternoon; I'll do that to-morrow morning.'

'Have you any idea what sort of work it will be?'

'He wanted me to go into the Church, you know, but I knocked that plan on the head long ago. I'm not a humbug, with all my faults, pet, and so I can't be a clergyman when I don't feel like one.'

'I don't believe you have any faults, Dick!'

Dick grew very grave, an expression of horror coming into his eyes.

'You mustn't say that, darling, or you'll make me so awfully ashamed of myself that I shan't be able to look in your dear face!—Mattie, you don't know, thank God you don't, what temptations a fellow, who's a bit wild by nature, has to fight with when he goes into the world. I could loathe myself now for even having

thought of them, only I know that knocking about has made a man of me;—but, . . . when you try to make out I'm *good*, . . . confound it, my darling, you really *mustn't!*'

'Very well, Dick,' said Mattie, submissively; 'but I can't help my thoughts. I think good people are always good in spite of things.—Oh, I can't explain just what I mean,—but if a hero can't be a hero until he's been tried somehow, how can anyone be *quite* good until he's seen badness?'

Richard was much struck by this observation.

'My darling, how clever you are!'

'And pretty, Dick?—*Do* say you think I'm pretty.'

'You're more,' said Richard.

For a few minutes they did not speak; and the sky darkened quickly as night

grew older. The leaves rustled together in the cool breeze that was blowing, bringing the scent from near hayfields to add to the fragrance of the cottage flower-garden.

The cries of the children at play by the roadside reminded Mattie and Dick that they ought to whisper their conversation, particularly when steps were heard going by on the gravel path outside the wall.

'You haven't told me what work you are going to do, Dick?'

'What does it matter? I should be happy doing anything for you.'

'I hope it will be work you can like for its own sake.'

'My uncle, the pater's brother, is some kind of merchant in the City, and he is willing to take me as clerk, I know, so probably that will be my rank and occupation, dearest.'

'Then you will please him so well that he will confide important business to you, and end by taking you into partnership! That is what ought to happen, Dick, as he's a relation.'

'Fellows who get taken into partnership usually begin by marrying their employer's daughter, Mattie.'

'Oh, but you mustn't marry anyone but me, Dick!'

'As though I would! Not a Venus made mortal, not a Helen, not a Diana!'

Mattie was surprised, but she was wise enough to take care not to show her ignorance, only her small amount of knowledge.

'The moon is called Diana, isn't she, Dick?'

Richard was just about to quote Keats, when an interruption occurred.

At the base of the wall an oval hole had

been made to allow the rain-water to drain from Mrs. Drinkwater's garden into the gutter of the road, and through this hole came slowly old Neptune, the rector's water-spaniel.

Waddling on decrepit limbs to Richard's feet, the dog gave a whine of satisfaction, and paid no attention to the whispered command, 'Home, Nep, home at once!' nor to a whistle from without, which Dick recognised as his father's.

In another moment the rector's head appeared above the wall.

Mattie started up with a shrill little scream; Richard stood and faced his father, while his expression had that equivocal shame and the ruddy colour which usually mark the countenance of a transgressor discovered in the act of transgressing.

'Richard, what are you doing here?'

The words were spoken in the rector's most severe tones, those that Dick most often heard.

'I called to see Mrs. Drinkwater, and she sent me to see her garden; Miss Purvis had been showing me the—the mulberry-tree.'

Dick was profoundly aware of the absurdity of the explanation, but it was the best he could make at the moment.

The rector eyed him steadily, and preserved his own temper by a worthy effort, which was dictated by a sense of propriety and wisdom, as well as by conscience. To have expressed dismay or anger at finding his son with Mattie, before Mattie's own eyes, would have been 'putting ideas into the young woman's head.' For Mr. Broughton, while suspecting his son of indulging in a disgraceful flirtation, had

not imagined that a solemn betrothal had already come to pass. That consummation to a love-affair he intended to prevent. Perhaps Purvis's daughter was trying artfully to ensnare Dick ;—that was another thing. The rector did not believe that Dick was yet ensnared.

'As it is rather late, Richard, you had better accompany me home.'

Richard, whose feeling of being a transgressor was leaving him, was prepared to defend his lady-love had the rector said a single word that he could have taken offence at on her behalf, but while Mattie was merely ignored he had no excuse for defence.

'As you like, sir. I must go through the house to say good-night to Mrs. Drinkwater, but I'll be with you in a moment.'

Mattie had already disappeared. The

rector, who was hanging on the wall by both hands, found out that his position lacked dignity, and fell back on to his feet, Neptune having consented to return to heel.

Dick joined his father, expecting a lecture which might force an explanation, but Mr. Broughton dismissed the matter in a few words.

'I hope you will not countenance Mrs. Drinkwater's rebellion against me, Richard; she has been exceedingly impertinent all the year. I cannot approve your familiarity with her, or with Mattie Purvis, because they are relations of the man who has made himself my foe in my own parish.'

'What has the captain been doing?' asked Dick, quickly.

'He has to-day disseminated hand-bills

throughout Maycross and Huntstown, announcing that a socialist meeting will be held on Church-green on Sunday morning at eleven.'

'That is because you've vexed him by closing "The Four Stars' Inn?"'

'Because I have done my duty,' corrected the rector.

'I knew he'd be even with you in some way; he is not the kind of man to submit tamely.'

'Your prediction has scarcely been verified as yet, Richard. It is not likely that the authorities will permit the Sabbath to be dishonoured, and my congregation disturbed and scandalised, by socialistic gatherings in the immediate vicinity of my church.'

'If you had not closed the inn Purvis's men would have been content to air their

eloquence there; you know, sir, nothing aids a cause so much as martyrdom among its members.'

'Your language is ridiculously strong: you speak as though the Riot Act were about to be read and the people dispersed by the bayonet.'

'Well, sir, how else can they be dispersed? Only by the flat of a policeman's truncheon, and that is a weapon not to be despised. If they choose to resist to the uttermost—and they will if the captain can manage them—I don't see how any arrests are to be made without force being called in.'

'We are not in Ireland, Richard.'

'Perhaps you mean to get Purvis himself arrested?'

'That will depend upon the circumstances.'

Dick shrugged his shoulders, and changed the subject of conversation.

'I've been wanting to speak to you about myself, sir, and this seems a favourable opportunity.'

'I am surprised that you should wish to do so. You expressed a desire to go to the devil, when we last spoke of your future.'

'I was annoyed beyond endurance. The truth is, sir, I shall do no good while I'm at home; everything is against me.'

'It is not certain that you did any good while abroad.'

'For the same reason,' cried Dick, hotly; 'because I was watched day and night, was denied any freedom, was made to feel that I wasn't trusted.'

'There may have been adequate motive

for suspicion and supervision, Richard, but I will say nothing of that at the moment. What do you wish? You have probably formed some plan.'

'Leaving the details to you, sir. I want to set to work—in London, I should prefer.'

The rector eyed his son keenly, meditating upon the possible ulterior motive which influenced him; but Dick's face betrayed nothing more than did his words.

'If you are earnestly trying to turn over a new leaf, there is no one who desires more to see you a reputable, successful man than I, your father. To-night you have been behaving foolishly enough.'

'I don't admit that, sir.'

'There are two considerations which induce me to help you in attaining your

object, Richard; firstly, I am anxious not to discourage your higher ambitions; secondly, if you are determined to disgrace yourself, I would rather you should do it in London than in my own parish. Now, don't speak for a moment, until I have finished my explanation. You are now beginning your manhood, choosing either honour or dishonour, making a choice which will influence your whole life. I am willing to believe that you choose honour, therefore you shall begin a more responsible existence as soon as you please. My brother Charles is ready to receive you, as clerk, into his office.'

Disrespectful Dick thought to himself that it was a wonder 'the old boy's prosing had ended so satisfactorily.'

'Thanks, sir,' he answered. 'Then, if the mater is willing I'll go on Monday.

It's not my way to make promises and protestations, but if you knew all that's in my mind you'd understand that I'm quite as anxious to settle down, and earn my own living, as you can be for me.'

'Very well, Richard, I am glad to hear it.'

Anna met her father and brother as they entered the house. Her eyes looked reproach at Dick, and flashed a glance of contrition at the rector.

'Oh, Dick, you promised to help me with those books, and I had no sooner gone out of the room to speak to Mr. Hedworth than you ran away!'

'My dear Nan, the truant's come back, you see. I'll do the books for you after supper.'

CHAPTER XIII.

Anna's exalted mind had been sobered by her father's caution respecting Barbara Morne's probable influence upon her; the remembrance of Richard's unworthy romance had produced even more chilling an effect; yet she was no sooner alone than her thoughts began to wander further and further into forbidden lands of conjecture, until she was herself the heroine of some possible love affair, the victim of strange fates, encompassed by changing fortunes. Girls who leave these dreams to take place when they are no longer in

their first youth, find them all the stronger when they do happen, just as the measles is a mild illness for a child but serious for an adult. No doubt there is an element of romance in every heart; but dreams of the kind Anna dreamt are likely to cultivate every tender impulse, encourage every sentimental fancy.

Because her existence had always been prosaic she enjoyed her imaginations keenly now they were sufficiently strong to seem real at times; household cares, Richard's presence, her father's glance, had power as yet to drive all fancy far from Miss Broughton's mind, but the effect of none of these contradictions lasted during solitude.

Instead of going to bed and to sleep as soon as possible after going to her room, Anna sat by the window and thought.

Barbara's portrait was still on the mantelshelf, and Barbara's personality pervaded Anna's reflections. She began by saying to herself, 'Poor Barbara,' and soon arrived at envying her. Barbara was free, very free; Barbara was clever, brilliantly clever; Barbara had seen the world.

And many of Anna's most rebellious longings to-night were due to the simple fact that Mr. Hedworth had seemed more the anxious father than the earnest lover; little Trot was still feverish, her symptoms, though a repetition of countless former symptoms, had engrossed Philip's interest.

Anna knew that Mr. Hedworth was an excellent man, guessed that he loved her truly, but she could discern little romance in his affection. She was quick to find or miss some kinds of sentiment, while

slow to appreciate true pathos until it was pointed out to her.

The rectory was very quiet at night. Anna felt strangely conscious of her complete isolation and distance from her family, as she sat in the moonlight. The turning of a door-handle, one call down the corridor, and her father would have answered her by an anxious enquiry as to what ailed her; but this help could only be summoned for physical dangers, not for mental loneliness.

It was not so much that her surroundings were cramping, as that she was beginning to feel out of them. The haven of home was only secure while she sheltered in it, and she was floating in unknown waters now. She would never again be quite satisfied with the extent of the harbour.

What experiences Barbara had been through! Anna thought about the curate and Mr. Chester; those two episodes in her friend's adventurous life could not fail to interest her. She remembered, with compunction, that she had forgotten to beg Barbara to come to church on Sunday, and if Mr. Calkin's pew were empty, right under the pulpit, how ashamed she, Anna, would feel; what a bad impression would add to her father's disapproval of Barbara.

It was a new necessity that made Anna plot. Should she write to her friend? 'Please come to church and hear father preach,' sounded foolish, would look worse written, whereas a word or two let fall in conversation, 'Oh, you will come to father's church on Sunday, won't you? I want you to see the carvings,' would

arrange the matter satisfactorily. To-morrow was Saturday. Anna determined to go and see Barbara for a few minutes in the evening, if they did not meet before then. Her father would be surprised at her wishing to go to the Hollies again so soon; she might be obliged to parry his questions; but her motive was undeniably good.

Anna shed a few tears before saying good-night to the moonbeams. Her usually placid nature was upset, introspective reflections were such a novelty to her that they made her feel morally disorganised, as a child, after first studying anatomy, experiences the unpleasant notion that body and limbs are wrongly put together. As the child also fears to move, anticipating possible ill effect, so Anna believed that, unless she exercised great care, dreadful

evils threatened her moral existence. Move a child must,—Anna could not continually check her psychological development; the future and its possibilities were unavoidable.

With the morning her hope that Barbara might come to the rectory in the course of the day kept down Anna's troublesome thoughts; and her mind had other affairs to consider. It was comforting to hear that Richard had made a resolution to begin life seriously; when he left Maycross all anxiety about his liking for Mattie would be at an end. Mr. Hedworth came in to say that Trot was decidedly better, and expressed warm gratitude to Anna who had advised some simple remedy. A few pleasant incidents make a day delightful, for as the sorrow is very real which is made up of pin-prick troubles, so

happiness is often formed of simple things.

The afternoon came and brought no visitor to the rectory, but Anna found her purpose easy to achieve, for her father was shut up in his study with Mr. Hedworth, both being busy over some important work concerning Purvis's defiance and objectionable proclamation.

In the carriage-drive of the Hollies Anna met Mr. Calkin, who shook hands, and regarded her with mild interest.

'A very fine day we have had, to be sure, Miss Broughton, but I should not be surprised to see rain within the next twenty-four hours.'

'Not to-morrow, I hope; a wet Sunday disappoints so many people,' she answered. 'I have come to see Barbara; . . . I hope you do not mind my calling in this very unceremonious manner.'

Mr. Calkin looked thoughtfully at her.

'You are very welcome at all times, my dear. Babara is attached to you, you know.'

Anna did know, but she blushed with pleasure at the remark. As she walked on, she said to herself that really Mr. Calkin was a very wise man, for a kind disposition is worth more than cleverness! She was spared the necessity of asking for Miss Morne, by seeing her in the garden.

Barbara was walking away down one of the shady alleys of the unkempt shrubbery, and though Anna followed as fast as she could, she presently lost sight of her friend among the bushes. There was a regular maze of paths, separated one from another by overgrown privet hedges which had reached the height of trees and tangled

their branches together over-head. Perplexed, Anna paused, was just making up her mind that she had better call aloud, when she heard a movement coming from the near turn of the path. Walking on a few steps she emerged into an open space where two garden-chairs were set upon a mossy square of ground, and found herself suddenly in the presence of a man.

Basil Morne was alone,—or had been a moment earlier;—he was leaning back with his arms folded on his chest, and his eyes fixed upon a yew bush close before him. Written papers were lying on his knee, but he was not reading, though his lips were moving.

Anna was seldom shy, yet she felt so now. Should she speak, wait silently until Mr. Morne looked at her, or steal away? If she spoke, words were diffi-

cult to choose and would sound startling; if she waited in silence he might wonder how long she had been watching his reverie, and think her foolish or ill-mannered; worst of all would be to be seen stealing away, as though too shamefaced to confront the awkwardness of the situation into which trespassing had brought her.

Basil began to mutter; he was repeating something by heart; presently he spoke aloud, with declamation worthy of an actor.

> 'Be you not troubled with the time, which drives
> O'er your content these strong necessities;
> But let determined things to destiny
> Hold unbewailed their way.'

'I must beg your pardon,' said Anna, 'but I . . . I was looking for Barbara.'

Basil Morne was not a creature of quick

actions. For a half-minute he looked at Anna, then rose.

She had time to notice that he did not mind having been overheard, and that his eyes were pale blue, too pale for his dark face, before he lifted his hat, and answered; while slipping a leaf among his papers as a marker,

'Barbara was here a moment or two ago, and she will soon come back. Will you sit down and wait for her? She has only gone as far as the orchard.'

'If I am not disturbing you.'

He smiled. Having handed her a garden-chair, he remained standing, regarding her keenly.

'I was not busy; I had been giving my sister a *résumé* of a political speech I have to deliver at Walminister,—perhaps you know that she takes interest in

such matters?—and, in her absence, I was learning a quotation which occurs in it. We politicians can never get away from work.'

'You never forget your Cause?' she asked.

Basil nodded.

Anna could not help admiring the single-mindedness of this faith on his part. She was beginning to recover her natural calmness, and returned Mr. Morne's scrutiny gravely, as she often scrutinized the faces of the young women of her class.

These two were mildly curious about each other, though the man did not admit to himself that his sister's friend was a subject of interest to him. He was unembarrassed, although he had been found declaiming verse to the air. In all matters

he was 'to himself a law rational.' Because it was he who had declaimed, the action had been exempted from any absurdity, in his opinion.

Basil discovered that this strange girl bore inspection well, neither simpering nor blushing. Her perfectly frank eyes met his without faltering. He was pleased with her; so smiled again, pleasantly.

'You are Miss Broughton?' he remarked, needing no answer. 'My sister says that we are to be friends, you and I.'

The sentence from some lips would have been mere impertinence; from Basil's it was condescendingly amiable.

'If we do not succeed in becoming friendly I fear Barbara will give me up,' said Anna, with a return smile; 'for I know she is greatly influenced by you.'

'There is trust between us; it dates

back to childhood. A woman can't be too much influenced by anyone she trusts absolutely. In proof of which, Barbara has gone to gather cherries as I advised; —now you will be able to share the feast.'

Laughing, Anna explained how she had seen Barbara's skirts in the distance and had followed them until the maze of paths had made pursuit impossible.

'Bab was acting the will-of-the-wisp,' Basil replied. 'She wanted to call on you this evening, but I dissuaded her, believing that Saturday is a busy time at a rectory.'

'That was thoughtful. I have been hoping all day that Barbara would come; still, I should have been sorry had mother not been able to welcome her, and mother is ill to-day.'

'Mrs. Broughton is an invalid?'

'Yes, but she does not suffer much, I am thankful to say; and she is nearly always cheerful. My brother is staying with her this evening; he is going to London on Monday—she is happiest when Richard is with her. When he has gone, I shall give her one of Barbara's books to read.'

Basil was amused at the simplicity of this explanation, and the implied compliment to the work of fiction.

'You care for the stories?' he asked.

'For the only one I know—"Janet Wilbraham's Sacrifice."'

'"Janet Wilbraham's Sacrifice"!' he repeated, amazed. 'Ah! I remember now. Bab made you promise not to read her later works. Well, it was all for the best.'

'Is it possible that you do not approve of Barbara's writing, Mr. Morne?'

'Not altogether. I regret its cynicism. Success and fame are only obtainable by compromises, moral sacrifices sometimes. Men should be left to struggle for them: a woman ought to be perfectly true to herself.'

'You mean that Barbara is not cynical, though she writes cynically?'

'Exactly. A cynical style has made the success of many an unliterary book,—it buys popularity; and I am not certain that Bab's talent is strong enough to stand alone.'

'But she is very clever.'

'A clever woman is not necessarily a born novelist.'

'You think that novelists must be born, not made?'

'*Great* novelists, not merely successful ones.'

'Oh, your opinions are very depreciatory!' said Anna. 'I have been accustomed to consider as great any novelist who writes thoroughly interesting books.'

'You have much right upon your side; for after all, though critics prate solemnly, the novelist's first object is to produce interest.'

The conversation had been conducted on the lines of an 'interview.' This is usually the case when a girl talks with a man for whose abilities she has respect.

'What an age Barbara is!' he added, lightly. 'She must be eating all the cherries.'

'That is a libel!' cried Barbara's voice close behind them. 'My darling Anna, I shall never forgive you for discovering

Basil for yourself. I meant to parade him down to the rectory and show you some of his good points before you found out his bad ones.'

Anna's eyes brightened with pleasure at her friend's arrival.

'You have yourself to blame, dear,' she answered, 'for you would not let me catch you,—you disappeared in this labyrinth of paths, and if I had not found Mr. Morne I might have been still wandering among them.'

'We call this maze "Vanity Fair," so you were indeed out of place in it.'

'After Thackeray's novel,' said Anna, thoughtfully. 'I have not read it.'

The brother and sister looked at each other and smiled.

'Let us return to idyllic attractions,' suggested Miss Barbara, languidly. 'Basil,

silly boy, go and gather a cabbage-leaf for a plate for Anna.'

Anna begged Mr. Morne not to trouble, but he went readily to do his errand, and, as he walked away, Barbara, leaning forward in her chair, whispered eagerly,

'Anna, isn't he handsome? I firmly believe he is the only thoroughly lovable man in the world. If I'm grateful for anything, I am for the possession of such a brother.'

At that instant Barbara was 'true to herself.'

Anna was bewildered by the strange question. Handsome?—yes, she thought Basil Morne handsome, now that her opinion was asked. He was such a man, for all his good looks; it would never have occurred to her to notice that his features were of classical form. His whole

personality was impressive, no detail claimed attention—unless it was the vague fact of his exceeding darkness.

Now she was obliged to watch him as he returned down the path; to note the strong lines about his firm mouth and the deep shadow round his eyes—the slight bend of his eyebrows, which gave a certain sternness to his expression. She wondered how old he was, and whether he had ever been in love. On the whole she was inclined to think he had—and to pity him.

'He . . . is the most handsome man I ever saw,' she answered, slowly, feeling it almost an impertinence to speak of the man who was so near, yet beyond hearing. 'Is he happy?'

The question escaped her lips; she was shyly sorry she had asked it, but Barbara,

though she had only time to answer in a monosyllable, did not resent the inquiry.

'No.'

The evening passed very fast to Anna, and it was late, according to her ideas of lateness, when she had parted from her friends and was hurrying home. But her visit had been a distinct success, for she had asked Barbara to come and hear 'father's sermon to-morrow,' and Barbara had promised to bring Basil.

Of all the impressions Anna carried away with her from that visit, the strongest was contained in the knowledge that Mr. Morne was not happy. A girl naturally loves to ponder on a mystery, especially if she suspects that it be connected with the tender passion; and this girl, as we know, was just awakened to consciousness of the universality of romance, there-

fore sought everywhere for evidence of it. She had forgotten the rector's sage counsel that, in his opinion, the Mornes were 'worldlings;' that romance was leading her brother astray; that Mattie Purvis existed; that she was not to allow herself to be influenced by worldly wisdom, but to remember always that she was her father's daughter, and that the eyes of the parish were upon her.

Moonlight was just beginning again, and it seemed to have strange power over poor Anna. As she hurried homewards, her lips were parted with a smile, her heart was beating fast more with excitement than with the exercise.

In the dimly-lighted hall of the rectory she ran against her father. He caught her by the arm, looking keenly into her brilliant eyes.

'Anna, where is your brother? Was he not with you?'

She started.

'No, father; I have been to the Hollies.'

'You have not kept your promise, Anna. Yesterday-night you allowed Richard to give you the slip, and to-night you have not attempted to keep him indoors.'

'I am very sorry. I thought he was in mother's room. Are you sure he is not?'

'He has not been there for the last hour.'

'But he is going away on Monday.'

'All the more reason why you should have exerted yourself to carry out my wishes during the short time that remained.'

'What can I do now?'

'Nothing. At least, you may give me my supper; it is time.'

Anna did not venture to ask any more questions, but threw aside her hat and gloves and followed the rector into the dining-room. The meal took place in depressing silence. When it was over father and daughter went out under the verandah in the front of the house to wait for the truant.

Mr. Hedworth passed by, along the road, going home, and Mr. Broughton called him.

Philip's face looked troubled, as he crossed the lawn and stood in the stream of light coming from the open window of the library.

'You have been into the town?' asked the rector.

'As far as Huntstown,' was the answer; 'I promised to take Matthew Lane a pair of boots, that he may be able to attend

church to-morrow; and I . . . I went to see Purvis.'

'To see *Purvis!* After his insulting reply to our letter!' cried the rector.

The curate explained, in his quiet, convincing, earnest tones.

'I felt that I was taking a great deal upon myself, but I was careful to explain that I was acting on my own responsibility. Knowing what a terrible annoyance his conduct is to you, I was anxious to spare no effort. But he will not hear reason, I am sorry to say.'

'You saw him in his home?'

'I went there, but he was out. I saw him in the field near the tow-path.'

'And he insulted you, I suppose?'

'He spoke insulting words, not applying them to me exactly. He seems a very violent man.'

'Your zeal is praiseworthy, Hedworth, and I commend your endeavour. We must await to-morrow's events, and trust that the police authorities will attend to my application.—I wished to ask you if you had seen my son this evening?'

Philip looked sadly at his rector.

'Yes, I saw him half-an-hour ago. He said that he was coming straight home.'

'Where was he?'

'In his boat,—on the river.'

The clear whistle of a popular tune was heard in the lane, and Richard opened the garden gate and entered.

As he came into the circle of light his radiant young face showed a little embarrassment but more happiness.

'I've not kept you up, I hope, sir,' he said, looking at his father. 'I can bolt

my supper in no time, and I don't think you go to bed as early as this.'

'Whom have you been with, Richard?'

The rector's question fell like a bomb among the trivialities of polite excuse.

Dick's face paled, his eyes flashed.

Anna peeped at him over her father's shoulder, conscious of a conflict in her own heart between love of docility and longing for freedom. Philip looked more pained than the culprit. He had great fear lest Dick, to whom he was sincerely attached, should dishonour himself by lying.

But the young man had no idea of doing so; his silence was innocent. He fully realised that the moment had come for truth-telling, that his secret was forced from him too soon by a power beyond his control.

'I have been talking to Mattie Purvis, sir. She is my promised wife.'

The words came trembling from his lips, and, at the moment, Dick wondered why he could not control this evidence of his strongly-wrought feelings. It was not courage or determination that he lacked, nor honest pride in the love of his dear one.

The rector turned to Philip.

'You saw them together and you did not tell me?'

'I answered your questions truthfully.'

'You have deceived and disappointed me.'

'You're a brick, Hedworth!' cried Richard, grasping the curate's hand.

'Oh, Dick, you can't mean to marry her!' said Anna, in a voice of horror.

'Richard,' asked the rector, sternly, 'is

this what you meant by your promise to turn over a new leaf?'

'It is, sir, and if you'll give me the chance I'll show you it is. I've been spied upon and distrusted at home, but I have found another woman besides my mother who is willing to place her faith in me; and, by God, I will be true to her,—she shall not repent.'

'Profanity is not argument. You are too excited to-night for common-sense to influence you, but to-morrow evening, when you have had time for reflection, you will inform me of your final decision,—whether you choose to give up this low-born woman, the child of a disreputable socialist, or to give up your home ties. Both you cannot have. Neither can I ask my brother to sanction your rebellion. If you choose to order your own life, throwing off parental

authority, you need not expect your uncle to provide you with the means of livelihood. Let me hear no more of this until six o'clock to-morrow evening, and do not tell your mother,—she is ill.'

'Richard,' said the curate, with a hand grasping the young man's arm, 'will you not tell your father what you told me, that you went to Purvis's house to see him, to try, as I tried, to persuade him to give up this meeting on the Green to-morrow?'

'No, I will explain nothing,' said Dick, between his teeth.—'I will do as you wish, sir, tell you my decision to-morrow evening. Now I suppose we may consider this interesting scene ended?'

The young rebel was very hot; Dick felt a burning longing to appeal, if not for his own sake, at least for Mattie's, but his pride kept him quiet, just as it kept tears back.

He passed indoors, and went up to his own room. Food just then would have choked him.

'He means no harm, sir,' pleaded the curate to his rector. 'Can you not give him a chance to change his mind, time to make sure if his love for this girl is absolute? And she is a good girl,—may not her influence over him act for his benefit after all?'

Anna had never seen such a scene between her father and Hedworth. The younger man, profoundly conscious of his impertinence, was trying to make his elder see himself in the wrong. Anna was not sure she did not admire Philip more than she had done before, but her sympathy was all with her father's conduct as far as opposition to Richard was concerned. This was because the girl Dick loved was

Mattie Purvis. Small facts alter the complexion of a woman's judgment.

The rector's face was worth studying; his temper, in its restraint, magnificent. No one could say that this man did not live up to his Christian principles.

'Good-night, Hedworth,' was his sole reply, before entering the open door of his home.

'Good-night, sir,' the curate answered; then, after pressing the hand Anna stretched out to him, went home in sorrow.

CHAPTER XIV.

'Your father seems troubled this morning, Richard.'

Mrs. Broughton was lying on her couch near the open window; from that position she could see the church-spire and hear the bells,—the nearest approach she could make, except by private prayer, towards sharing in the Sunday devotions to-day.

It was half-an-hour before service-time, and Dick had come in to spend all his spare moments with her.

His own spirits were not particularly depressed this morning, for he was buoyed up by the novel excitement of defending some one weaker than himself. Mattie looked to him as to a protector whose faith would never fail, and while she gave him her trust he would behave manfully in all matters concerning her. There was another aspect in which his conduct could be viewed, the aspect taken by his father and sister, which made his firmness appear rebellious obstinacy. But Dick's own opinion of himself was favourable today, he had got a cause to fight for, was personally certain of the worthiness of that cause, and proud of the manner in which he faced the foe without flinching.

His defence as yet had consisted solely of keeping a brave front, for at breakfast the rector had not spoken to him at all,

and Anna had not mentioned Mattie or the quarrel of the previous night. A truce had been declared; it would last until six o'clock that evening; and Dick showed no fear of the approaching moment for matching the forces of his determination and pride against those of his father's arguments.

Little Mrs. Broughton, gazing as usual into her dear boy's eyes, found new capacities for tenderness in them, and flattered herself by believing they had developed out of his ever-increasing love for her. Certainly no mother ever had a more affectionate son.

Dick was leaning against the window-frame, looking down at her.

'Sunday sermons aren't enlivening, either to those who preach or those who have to listen to them, dear; and there is

going to be a Socialist meeting on the Green during church hours.'

'Then no wonder your father is worried. Perhaps that is why he would not let me try to go to church this morning; he usually urges me to make an effort.'

'Effort indeed! you make too many. If I had the right to take care of you always, I wouldn't allow any efforts. But the pater's hard by nature; I suppose he can't help it.'

'Oh, Dick, you mustn't speak disrespectfully of your father.'

'Be sure, dear, I shall never want to speak so of my mother.'

Mrs. Broughton thought she had no right to smile with pleasure at this assurance, but she did so, both with lips and eyes.

'That's right!' cried Dick, 'a sunbeam

fell on your face then. Do you know, little mother, I'm awfully cut up at having to go away from you again so soon.'

'But you *must* go, darling. Why, you are a man, and men are not happy in dull country villages.'

'Some are; look at Hedworth.'

'You could not make yourself like Mr. Hedworth, not if you tried for a lifetime, Richard. I am glad, really glad for you to go and have your chance. It is a great pity it is so, but I am afraid you do not always get on well with your father; I fancied I heard him scolding you last night: and I am often terrified by my imaginations of what you might do. Dick, I have crept to the door, often and often, after you have been scolded, to listen for your step about the house. Once, years ago now, I heard you rush out of doors,

and then I believed my worst dread had come true.'

'Poor little woman! What was the worst dread?'

'That you would enlist.'

Dick laughed soothingly.

'Why, what a baby you must think me. I'm too ambitious to do that. To drudge in the ranks until youth is past, and get to be a lieutenant when grey hairs have come. No, indeed! I mean to be a successful business man, if I can manage to get a start.'

'Your uncle will give you that.'

Dick was silent. After a while he said, decisively,

'A man who is willing to work, never has to starve for want of a start, I'm sure of that. There, the bells are beginning, I haven't many more minutes to stay with

you. Mother, do you promise to write to me at least every fortnight when I'm away?'

'Richie, do you seriously think it necessary to ask me that?'

'Oh, a promise is a dreadfully serious thing, you know. Supposing the pater were to forbid you to write?'

'He would not.'

'Can't you suppose?'

Her pale little face clouded, her eyes looked frightened.

'I . . . I will promise you to write . . . I do promise, dear, solemnly, by my love for you!'

Dick gazed at her attentively, and understood that which was not spoken. Bluntly he put it into words.

'You mean that he won't dare to forbid you to break a promise? There—don't

answer . . . I'll only say, God bless you for it! I won't try to come between you and him.'

'You ought to make some promises to me, Dick, now you are going away again.'

Dick sat down on the window-ledge, turned his face slightly from her, and watched the birds at play on the lawn below, while he asked, laughingly,

'Don't I know what the first promise is that you want me to make? That I'll take great care of myself, eh, mother?'

'You are making fun of me, but I don't mind. Last autumn you caught a serious cold by forgetting to take to your warm clothes; you know you did, Dick, and you haven't lost the cough yet.'

'You can remind me in the letters.'

'So I can, that is a comfort. But dear, there is another thing,—you *will* keep

steady? A young man alone in London has so many temptations. I don't mean to preach to you as . . . as . . .'

She hesitated, and Dick smiled mischievously.

'As some parents do, you mean. In my worst moods I've never kicked against your preaching, and I never will, not if you want to lecture me when I'm sixty! As to the temptations, little mother, they won't appeal to me now, for I've got other things to think of. I really feel in a position to defy the devil and all his works.'

'Dick!'

'Isn't that an appropriate Sunday sentiment? But what are the other promises you want out of me? In five minutes I must be in the family pew helping Anna to sustain the credit of the Broughtons.'

'Promise to write me *real* letters, all about yourself, not about other people.'

'I may be very anxious to write about some one else,' said Dick.

'If you fall in love. Oh, you have done that already! I can see it in your face.'

'What a tell-tale countenance mine must be!' he exclaimed playfully, turning towards her again; 'for you could only see one side of it. Dear, don't question me now, for I've been ordered not to trouble you with my concerns,—you're not well enough, the pater says.'

'Are you happy, Richie? Tell me just that?'

'My face isn't tell-tale if it doesn't make that question superfluous.'

'She loves you, Dick? Really . . . fondly . . . faithfully?'

He had come nearer to her, and held

her hand while he stood by the head of the couch.

'Yes, mother; as I love her.'

'My boy . . . my *man*! . . . Oh Dick, a mother is a very jealous creature! such news is sweet and painful at once to her. Can any woman care enough for you, care more than I do?'

'Perhaps not—to the latter question—but my . . . my betrothed cares for me a great deal more than I deserve. Haven't I always been a scapegrace? But I don't know how it is, women seem kind to scapegraces! You must let me go now, or I shall tell you all about her.'

She pulled down his face, and held it between her two thin hands while she studied his eyes.

'This dear face . . . to think that an-

other woman has kissed it . . . Why, Dick, how you blush !'

'No one on earth has power to put you out of my heart, little mother.'

'I know it, my darling.—Dick, you're in trouble with your father about this.'

'I don't care, and you mustn't. He can't do me any harm; I'm above being injured by his opinions, scoldings, and punishments.'

'But he is your father.'

Dick was silent. He gave his mother a farewell kiss; which she returned, whispering proudly,

'You have grown handsome, Richie. You were beautiful as a baby.'

The young man laughed heartily. Waving his hand to her, he hurried out of the room.

Mrs. Broughton lay back among her pillows. Tears came into her eyes as she remembered those long-past happy days when Dick had been at the crowing, helpless stage of infancy, when he had depended so absolutely upon her, and she had never realised that a day would dawn when another woman would be dearer than she to him.

'I'm just a hard-hearted, jealous, selfish little woman,' she reproached herself; and dried the tears quickly in a shamefaced way, thankful that she had kept them from showing when Richard was in the room. Then she began to speculate upon the personality of her boy's sweetheart.—She was some girl of the neighbourhood; she was not the wife the rector would have chosen for his son; she was good, because she cared very, very much for Dick! 'I

wish I could see her!' cried little Mrs. Broughton, in her heart. 'I would tell her all Richard's best traits of character. I would find out how to make her care for me a little. I would learn to love her dearly . . . for his sake!'

The door opened, and the rector looked in.

'Good-bye, Alice.'

'Good-bye, Robert. Thank you for coming . . . Aren't you late?'

'It is my rule never to be late; I have only to cross the churchyard.'

'I meant that you usually are in the vestry many minutes before this.'

'I have a good reason for altering my rule on this occasion. Is your head any better, my dear?'

'Oh, so much! I shall be quite well by this evening.'

Mr. Broughton shut the door softly, and looked through the staircase window for a second before hurrying downstairs. His worried expression told of surprised anxiety.

Through the clear air came the sound of the clanging bells, and a murmur as of excited voices.

The rector took out his watch. Eleven o'clock exactly—and he was not in the church. There was no way of escape from his duty, for the curate was conducting service in a neighbouring parish to oblige an absent vicar, but, at that moment, Mr. Broughton longed for some excuse to disappoint his expectant parishioners who were awaiting his coming.

The truth of the matter was this—he could not reach his church without crossing the Green, and 'Captain' Purvis's

Socialistic meeting was in active progress. For some unaccountable reason the police authorities had not acted upon the rector's suggestions; he had planned a success for the opponents of socialism to-day, and now had to bear with a defeat. Instead of marching across the Green to the discomfiture of a half-dispelled crowd, as he had intended, he was obliged to make his way to his church with the 'Captain's' rhetoric assaulting his ears, and the jeers of the victorious mob exulting over his failure.

Proudly he bore himself, but in his soul was bitter mortification.

Purvis was mounted upon a waggon. He was a tall, stout man, owning a voice of exceptional volume; his red hair made a glowing spot of colour as the sun shone on it; his pale face was admiringly watched by half a hundred pairs of eyes. Some of

the spectators had been brought from a distance, some were women and children, but the meeting had assumed dimensions hitherto unknown at Socialist gatherings in Maycross.

All the pairs of eyes were turned upon the rector, as Purvis called attention to him.

'There goes the man, calling himself a man of peace, who tried to get the police to drive you to-day off your own village Green,—who has closed the "Four Stars" because he wants to close the mouths that argue against injustice,—who refused a poor aged woman her joint of Christmas beef because she wouldn't listen to his sermon every Sunday . . . Don't hurt him, my friends,—don't even throw mud at him, he isn't worth it,—but give three cheers for Socialism, which makes the poor man

the equal of the rich in power, and conquers all oppressors!'

The cheers hurt the vicar more than stones could have done. Then some members of the crowd became self-assertive.

'Three cheers for Mother Drinkwater!' cried one man. 'Down with all hypocrites!' shouted another; while lads ran after Mr. Broughton to the very doors of his church, asking questions, such as 'Don't yer see the p'lice comin'?' . . . 'Won't yer get up on the waggon an' be photergraphed?' . . . 'Aren't yer goin' ter give us a sermon, mister?'

The rector's only comfort was that he knew these were not Maycross boys.

Inside the church was whispering and excitement. The bells had not stopped ringing, for the word of command had not been passed to the men in the belfry, but

every man and woman knew that eleven o'clock had sounded some minutes ago.

The rector's appearance did not improve affairs, for, above the sounds of the service, louder than his most impressive tones, more piercing than the treble of the choir-boys, rose the roar of Purvis's half-hundred followers.—Hymns were inaudible when the mob outside the church began to sing in accompaniment to the strains of a brass band all the popular and not too reputable comic songs of the day. The sermon was preached, but not even Anna and Richard in the front pew could distinguish one sentence from another.

In the free parts of the church people were giggling and talking.

Barbara had kept her word, had brought her brother to church; and, now and again,

peeped across sympathetically at poor Anna's flaming cheeks and downcast eyes.

Dick looked pale and stern, with his eyes also cast down; but he was thankful to have seen Mattie in her usual seat. He blessed her in his thoughts; her presence showed that she did not sympathise with her father's insulting defiance.

Basil Morne felt for the rector. He was not in the habit of going to church; being 'to himself a law rational,' he believed that to acknowledge the law of religion as expressed in any creed was derogatory to his superior knowledge. Others might bend the knee to their Maker, but he preferred to forget that he had not made himself. Others might pray for grace to live uprightly, but he did not care to own that Providence had power to rule or help him.

In the full strength of his manhood he did not realise that power, moral and physical, is God-given.

'This is scandalous!' he whispered to Barbara, who responded,

'Poor Anna!'

This made him watch Anna, and he made the discovery that her face was like a picture of 'Innocence' he had once seen in some foreign gallery. With the form of a woman she had the eyes of a child. This interested him.

CHAPTER XV.

When service was over,—a service at which not one fervent prayer had been said,—Barbara and Basil walked boldly into the vestry. Anna, who was waiting for her father, eyed this proceeding with anxiety.

The rector told his daughter afterwards that Mr. Morne had spoken 'as a Christian should.'

The dispersed congregation was not interfered with by Purvis's men; this was entirely owing to the 'Captain's' moderation, but the scene upon the Green was one

which Maycross had never before witnessed, and which Maycross never forgot. The Socialist manœuvre had been quite successful.

Anna, Richard and the rector walked home together, hearing, but pretending not to hear, the insulting remarks of ill-disposed persons. Mr. Broughton's affectation of cheerfulness was admirable: in forgetfulness he addressed some genial sentences to his son; Dick, however, was not deceived into imagining that he might expect leniency that evening. How, in the name of reason, could he expect the insulted rector to welcome Purvis's daughter as a future member of his own family?

Directly the house was entered, the faces of the three Broughtons underwent changes. Anna's eyes filled with tears; she kissed her father, whose white stern countenance told of inner fires of righteous anger;

Dick frowned. He was thinking that Purvis had done *him* the worst injury.

'Oh, father, it was splendid to see you facing that dreadful ordeal so bravely!'

'Nonsense, my dear; there was nothing about the miserable scene that could be called splendid.'

But though the rector contradicted his daughter's praise of his conduct he was soothed by the reflection that he had borne himself bravely, and that someone had noticed this. His opinion of Anna rose a great deal, which was the natural sequence to her admiring affection for him. Not since he had preached his first sermon, with a ragged London congregation trying to find amusement in the strange 'entertainment,' had he experienced as bewildering a difficulty to express himself as he had done to-day, when those howls of

derision and mocking songs had disturbed his country parishioners at their devotions. Seeing their mingled horror and amusement he had nearly broken down, so bitter had been the knowledge that the words by which he would have made Purvis's conduct appear in its true colours could not reach their ears. A dignified expression of regret that religion should have to fight against opponents so disgraceful had passed his lips, but no one had heard it. His sermon had been coherent, showing his mastery of his human passions, yet no man or woman would give him credit for his lucidity. Had he been talking Greek they could not have noticed the innovation.

Not caring to meet his wife's questions, which, out of her love, would be searching ones, he sent Anna into the invalid's room to give an account of the morning's deplor-

able incidents; and shut himself into his study. Richard, left to his own thoughts, laughed over them. Fortunately his levity was known to no one else, so passed unrebuked. A young man who loves and is loved is not easily made to take keen interest in the concerns of other men. Dick was sorry Purvis had been so foolish, that his own father had been insulted; but directly he was left to idle meditation the affair began to appear ridiculous to his judgment.

As he sat in the dining-room awaiting the mid-day meal, Neptune waddled up to him, thrusting a wet nose between his fingers with the familiar confidence of an aged pet not accustomed to rebuffs

'Ah, Nep',' murmured Dick, 'you're another creature against whom I might bear malice . . . . but I don't.'

The dinner, always a solemn meal at the rectory, was eaten almost in silence to-day. The man-servant who waited had been to church, so knew all about the Socialist meeting, and was not surprised to see that the rector's appetite was not as hearty as usual. Any conversation there was was due to Dick, who, though in disgrace, was not abashed. But, as his well-meant remarks received only monosyllabic answers, he soon gave up the attempt, and fell to the more congenial occupation of meditating upon the inexhaustible subject of Mattie.

At dessert the rector asked,

'Will you take a pear, Richard?' and Dick accepted the offer.

Then he felt a sudden wish to express a sentiment which should please his father.

'I daresay you won't be inclined to believe me, sir,' he blurted out; 'but I'd give

twenty pounds that this morning's work shouldn't have been done!'

Mr. Broughton pursed up his lips, as this abrupt allusion to a distressing subject made him speak of a matter upon which speech was painful.

'It is not at all difficult for me to believe in the genuineness of your regret, Richard; though I doubt whether you possess twenty pounds. There is no need for us to discuss this morning's occurrence; that man Purvis will find that the law will not sanction his conduct.'

Dick looked up quickly; checking an exclamation of surprise as he saw the rector's forbidding air of having dismissed the subject of conversation. So the power of the law was to be invoked against the captain, as the police had failed to break up the meeting? Dick gave a low whistle.

The afternoon passed very slowly. Again Richard was left to amuse himself: not being able to go to his mother's room, as she was lying down trying to sleep off her headache, he sauntered on to the verandah and sat down. Through the spaces between the tree-trunks, looking over the low paling round the garden, he could see a few scattered figures on the Green. All day long curious eyes would watch the white stone walls of the rectory, and the windows would be regarded with keen interest, particularly if a head appeared at any one of them. It was seldom that Maycross history became sensational, and the most trivial episode of this great quarrel, Rector *versus* Purvis, would afford excitement over countless Sunday dinner-tables.

The sunshine was hot. Dick basked

in it, as did Neptune at his feet on the flagstones. Nevertheless, hours seemed to elapse before the position of the sun in the heavens shifted, and the lengthening shadows foretold the death of the day.

As the heat lessened and the wind sprang up Dick became less somnolent. He was confronted by the first great crisis of his career, though, until now, he had not told himself so in so many words. The future was unpleasantly undefined; nothing about it was plain to him, but his resolution to marry Mattie as soon as he could earn a home for her, and his understanding that he would be obliged to leave the rectory hurriedly.

Beginning to consider the choice of professions open to him, he realised that most trades need men of special education to make them profitable; or, failing this, the

men must possess capital in coin instead of in brains. Dick's idle school-boyhood and empty pockets were against him.

At this juncture of reflections, Dick's father came upon the actual scene, and called him from the open French window of the library.

'Richard, it is six o'clock.'

'Coming, sir.'

As he passed by the front door Anna appeared to tell him that tea was ready, but he waved her away.

'Not for me, old girl, thanks.'

Anna glanced up at the clock in the hall. The sight of the hand pointing to six enlightened her as to Dick's meaning. Running on to the verandah, she caught him by the sleeve, crying,

'You *must* give her up, Dick! It is preposterous to think of your being

in love with quite a common girl.'

Richard, stung by this opprobrious description of his lady-love, laughed defiantly by way of answer. Anna watched him enter the library, and longed to follow, but dared not. The rector was standing by the hearth; his son stood facing him. There was in both their minds a strange consciousness that this solemn interview was quite unnecessary, an anti-climax to last night's scene between them. The door of the room was open, showing a vista of the inner hall and staircase.

Richard waited for his father to speak first.

'You have had ample time for reflection,' began Mr. Broughton. 'I do not know how, after Purvis's behaviour to-day, you, my son, can possibly contemplate accepting him as a rela-

tive. It only remains for me to repeat the terms I offered you before,—if you will give up this foolish fancy for a pretty but vulgar girl, I will help you, as far as I can, to make a worthy career for yourself. If you choose to link your fortunes with those of these Socialist persons, I can do nothing for you, and my doors must remain closed to you. At your age, Richard, many a young man has ruined his life by a low marriage. If you obey me now, you will be grateful to your own common-sense, as well as to me, when you are a man of middle age.'

This temperate tone made Dick calm.

'I am engaged to Mattie, and I can't give her up, sir; but I will promise to wait for her until I am able to earn my own living.'

'That will not do, Richard. I cannot

countenance the engagement, as you call it.'

'Good heavens, sir, do you want me to jilt her?'

'The affair might be arranged. Of course I should shrink from the publicity of a breach of promise suit, but I would pay a sum down privately to rescue you from this unfortunate entanglement.'

'That I should listen tamely to such a suggestion is an insult to her.'

'Apart from that, Richard, would you not be glad to be rid of her?'

'I would rather be rid of . . . of . . .'

'Of me, of your sister, of your home, and of your mother.'

'I shall never be rid of my mother!' cried Dick, hotly; 'the rest of you may desert me, sir, but she never will!'

'You believe that she will accept that common young woman as a daughter?'

'Mattie is a lady by birth, and has the instincts of one. That the captain has come down in the world and taken to bad ways is not her fault.'

'Do not speak hastily. It is my duty to ask you for a definite answer, but you need not hurry. Take five minutes' consideration while I answer this letter.'

The rector sat down to his desk and wrote. Dick watched the pen travelling over the paper, and wondered whether he would ever long to be back in this familiar room, or whether he would find the world and the struggle for life entrancing. All his associations with this study were not pleasant ones; here he had come to be caned for childish sins, to be reprimanded for youthful pranks, to be lectured upon the subject of the virtues expected of a young man who was born the son of

a rector. He was just remembering the changed feelings with which he had entered the room on his last return from a long absence, how his old sense of awe at the sight of the carved desk and high elbow chair of his father had deserted him,—when the rector signed his name to the letter, and turned round from the table.

'This is to your uncle Charles, informing him of what has taken place, and requesting him to give you no assistance. He would not be likely to countenance your rebellion against my authority.—Well, Richard, what is your choice?—Is the letter to go?'

'Yes.'

'You refuse to give up Miss Purvis?'

'I do, sir.'

Mr. Broughton folded the letter, placed

it in an addressed envelope, and affixed a stamp.

'You will repent this.'

'Never, sir.'

'When you do you may come home again.'

'When do you wish me to leave, sir?'

'As to-day is Sunday you may wait for the eight o'clock train to-morrow morning.'

'I shall not wait, I will go . . . now.'

'If you find yourself in danger of starving at any time you may apply to me for some slight assistance.'

'You are very generous!' exclaimed Dick, sarcastically.

Mr. Broughton nodded.

'I am, Richard. But I do not wish ill to befall you: you inherit your mother's unfortunate weakness of constitution, and are therefore unfitted for a hard life;—I

only desire to prevent you from marrying, as I conclude that the Purvis girl will not accept love in a garret. She willingly accepts my heir, but she will probably throw you over when she understands that I have done with you.'

'You wrong her.'

'That remains to be seen.—You are going?—Do not distress your sister by making any scene.'

'I am going to say good-bye to my mother.'

'I cannot allow you to do so. I will break the bad news gently to her. She is resting, and must not be disturbed.'

A trembling, faint voice from the doorway cried,

'Dick . . . oh, my Dick!'

Both men looked into the hall. Little Mrs. Broughton had crept down the stairs,

and was standing at their foot, clinging with both hands to the banisters. Mother love had warned her by a strange kind of intuition that her boy was in trouble. Anxious she had been all day on account of the few words he had let fall about his love for some un-named girl, and his father's anger. Having heard voices in the study, her fears had tempted her to make an effort she had not made for years, and, reaching the last step safely, she had listened to her husband's prohibition. Richard was to go away without saying good-bye to her.

The son was quicker than the father. He was by his mother's side in a moment, with his arms about her waist, almost carrying the slim, light figure; while his curly brown hair nestled against her fair plaits.

'Never mind, little mother;—I'm not going far, you know, only to London; no man can stop at home always.'

'Alice,' said the rector, 'you have been very imprudent; you might have fallen, trying to come downstairs alone. Let me take you back to your room. Richard has seriously displeased me, and is leaving home to-morrow morning early.'

'To-night,' contradicted Richard.

He was obliged to let his mother's light weight be taken from his arms by those of his father, but he held her hand still, and kissed her lips tenderly.

'Good-bye, Dick, my boy!'

'Good-bye, darling.'

That was all that was spoken, but in the mother's heart were unsyllabled prayers for him.

He was going into his room to pack his

few possessions, but he looked back from the door to wave his hand, and smile radiantly at her.

'Don't worry about me, dear, I shall get on famously in London!'

'God bless you, Dick, and God bless—'

The last word was lost, for the rector hurried his wife into her room and shut the door; but Richard understood his mother's meaning. With the courage of a timid creature who is roused to the defence of a loved one, she had been about to proclaim her entire sympathy with the culprit.

'She was going to bless *her?*' cried Dick to himself. 'Had ever another fellow such a mother?'

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